About Groups

The Manage Groups tool is used to create group work areas for users. Groups can be used to organize users’ work on projects or assignments, or to create special work areas for users with different learning needs.

Users can belong to any number of groups in the same course. For example, a user could belong to a group for each class project, a special interest discussion group, and a group for advanced users all at the same time. Each group can have its own discussion forums, dropbox folders, and locker area to work in. Members of groups can be graded as a team or individually.

Access the Groups Tool

To access the Manage Groups Tool in your BOLT course:

On your Course Home Page,

- Use the Course Administration widget to
- Select Groups in the list of course administration tools.

Understanding How Groups are Set Up

Before setting up groups you should know how you want them to be organized. A number of things can affect how users are enrolled in groups:

- Were groups set up before or after you enrolled users?
- Are users auto-enrolled in groups?
- Are course participants placed in groups randomly?
- Can users self-enroll in groups?
- What Enrollment Type did you choose?

Tip: In most cases it is better to set up groups after the majority of users are enrolled in your course. This gives you a better idea of how many users you are organizing and how many groups you need. Setting up groups after enrollment can also ensure better distribution of users between groups.

Warning: In order for users to be enrolled in groups automatically the ‘Auto-Enroll New Users’ option must be enabled under Advanced Properties. Contact your site administration if you are having difficulties.
The following descriptions explain the options available when creating new groups and provide conceptual information on when they should be used.

**Enrollment types**

**# of Groups – No Auto Enrollments** A specified number of groups are created, which you can add any number of users to through the Enroll Users page.

- Use this enrollment type when you know how many groups you want to create and which users you want in each group. This option could be used when you have a teaching model that divides course participants into specific learning levels or when you want to divide users by skill or interests.

**# of Groups** A specified number of groups are created.

- If ‘Auto-Enroll New Users’ is turned on, users are added to groups using a brick laying algorithm, regardless of whether they enrolled before or after the groups were created. For example, if a class has 23 users and 5 groups, the first user is added to Group 1, the second to Group 2, etc. The sixth user returns the enrollment sequence to Group 1. Groups 1, 2, and 3 have 5 users and Groups 4 and 5 have 4 users. If a new user enrolls later, they are put in Group 4.

- If ‘Auto-Enroll New Users’ is turned off, the specified number of groups are created with no users enrolled in them. You can enroll users using the Enroll Users page.

- Use this enrollment type when you know how many groups you want to create, but want the system to place users in groups for you. This option could be used when you want group membership to be indiscriminate, or when classroom, resource, or teaching assistant availability restricts the number of groups you can have.

**Groups of #** Groups are created to contain the specified number of users.

- The minimum number of groups needed to place users into groups of the specified maximum size is created. More groups are created when they are needed to accommodate additional users.

- If users are enrolled before groups are set up and ‘Auto-Enroll New Users’ is turned on, users are added to groups using a brick laying algorithm. For example, if a maximum group size of 5 users is chosen for a class of 23, then 5 groups are created, with the first user added to Group 1, the second to Group 2, etc. The sixth user returns the enrollment sequence to Group 1. Groups 1, 2 and 3 have 5 users and Groups 4 and 5 have 4 users. A new user who enrolls later is put in Group 4.

- If users are enrolled after groups are set up, there is no way for the system to determine how many groups in total are needed. Users are added to groups using a bucket-filling algorithm. For example, if a maximum group size of 5 users is chosen for a class in which 23 users eventually enroll, the first five users are added to Group 1, the sixth through tenth user to Group 2, etc. After 23 users are enrolled, groups 1-4 have 5 users and Group 5 has 3 users.

**Note:** If you have Auto Enroll New Users selected and all of the existing groups have reached their maximum size, new users are added to a new group. Because there is no way to know how many new users will join, all new users are added to the same group until it is full. This is called a bucket-filling algorithm because the limits of one group must be met before another group is started.
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- If ‘Auto-Enroll New Users’ is turned off, the minimum number of groups needed to accommodate users up to the specified group size are created with no users enrolled in them. If no users are enrolled in the course, one group is created. You can enroll users using the Enroll Users page.

- Use this enrollment type when you know how many users you want in each group. This option could be used when you have assignments that require work to be divided between a specific number of users, or when you can only accommodate a set number of users in a lab or work area at one time.

Groups of # - Self Enrollment  The minimum number of groups needed to accommodate users in groups of a specified maximum size are created automatically.

- Users choose the group into which they want to enroll from their My Groups page, accessible from the classlist.

- Use this enrollment type when you know how many users you want in each group, but you want to allow users to choose their own groups. This option could be used when you want users to choose their groups based on friendship, learning style, schedules, or geographic location.

Note:  If users are not already enrolled in your course, then only one group is initially created with this option. You can use the Edit Category page to add additional groups. You might want to add additional groups even if users are already enrolled to ensure all users have options when forming groups.

# of Groups – Self Enrollment  A specified number of groups are created, into which users enroll from their My Groups page, accessible from the classlist.

- Use this enrollment type when you want to make a specific number of groups available for users to join. This option could be used for organizing groups on specific topics, which users could join based on interest, or for creating groups that are responsible for specific aspects of a larger project, which users could join based on knowledge or task preferences.

Advanced Properties

Auto-Enroll New Users - New users are automatically added to the group with the least users, or to a new group if the maximum size of all existing groups has been met. Use this option when you don’t want to manually add new users to groups.

Note: If you choose the enrollment type Groups of # you might end up with a group that has only one or a few users in it. You can manually change group enrollment, including adding users to full groups, using the Enroll Users page. See Enrolling users in groups for more information.

Randomize users in groups - Users are added to groups based on a random order. If this option is not selected, users are added to groups alphabetically based on their order in the classlist.
Additional Options

Set Up Discussion Areas - Allows you to select or create group specific discussion forums and topics. Use this option when you want users to share ideas, ask questions, and discuss material with other members of their group using the Discussions tool.

Set Up Locker - Allows you to create a locker area for each group. Use this option when you want users to store their work in a group work area where other members of the group can view and modify it.

Set Up Dropbox - Allows you to create dropbox folders for each of the groups. A group can have multiple folders belonging to different categories. Use this option when you want each group to have its own folders into which assignments are submitted. This could be helpful if different users are responsible for grading different groups.

Enrollment Scenario 1

You have a class of 185 users.

Your latest assignment requires users to use a software program that is only available in certain labs which must be booked and supervised. You book 4 labs that can hold 50 users each and create 4 corresponding groups.

You select group options as follows:

- For the Enrollment Type you select # of Groups and set the Number of Groups to 4.
- You leave both Auto-Enroll New Users and Randomize users in groups cleared because new users will not be joining your course and you are not worried about having an unbiased distribution of users, since group membership will not influence users’ grades.
- You select the Set Up Discussion Areas option and create discussion forums where users can post and answer questions about the computer software.
- You leave Set Up Locker and Set Up Dropbox cleared because you do not want users collaborating on their projects and you already have your dropbox folders organized by assignment rather than group membership.

Enrollment Scenario 2

You have a class of 29 users.

Your latest assignment requires that users research a particular topic, write a report on it, and hold a seminar for the class. You know that you want users to work in groups of 5, but you want to give them some flexibility in choosing both who they work with and what topic they work on.

You select group options as follows:

- For the Enrollment Type you select Groups of # - Self Enrollment. You set the Number of Users per group to 5 and rename each of the 6 groups after the assigned group topic.
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- Since users are selecting their own groups, the **Auto-Enroll New Users** and **Randomize users in groups** options do not apply.

- You select the **Set Up Discussion Areas** option and create discussion topics for each of the groups. You associate the topics with a grade item and tell users that you expect them to communicate with each other on their progress and concerns through the Discussions tool. They receive individual grades based on their participation.

- You select the **Set Up Locker** option and encourage users to save their collaborative work in their group locker area.

- You select **Set Up Dropbox** and create separate dropbox folders for each group’s Research Notes, Report, and Seminar Notes. You associate the folders with Grade Items and assign the same grade to all members of the group.