

Small Group Discussion: Evaluation and Grading

Most medical educators believe the small group discussion format favors the learning of complex social and ethical issues in medical practice. Small groups are also an excellent setting to introduce patient interviewing principles (including the social conduct of the physician in clinical encounters) and to review and solve problems that may have arisen during patient contacts in the preceptorship.

Evaluating small group participation is not easy. However, because the practice of medicine takes place in a social setting, and because clinical problem-solving so often requires collaboration with colleagues—another social function—it is necessary to help you develop and assess your group skills. Naturally, not everyone shines in group discussions. Nor are we looking for maximum verbal participation, for that would not be desirable physician behavior. Listening is as important as talking in medical encounters. Here are the factors we ask your small group facilitators, patient examination tutors, and you, to consider as guidelines to effective small group participation.

1. **Acquiring/integrating knowledge:** includes familiarity with assigned readings, explaining how different kinds of information fit together, integrating information from other sessions and preceptorship experiences.
2. **Reasoning skills:** includes identifying problems, generating hypotheses, and linking conclusions to evidence.
3. **Communication skills:** includes ability to convey relevant values as well as information, in a manner that fits the context of the discussion.
4. **Interpersonal /social skills:** includes observance of social amenities, listening as well as speaking, signaling interest in others' contributions, and assisting in conflict or impasse resolution.
5. **Group process assessment skills:** includes giving and receiving positive as well as negative critical feedback to individuals, and commenting on the functioning of the group.

Your group facilitators will be asked to assess each student's performance on each of these factors. (For more specifics, refer to the evaluation forms which follow.) They have been urged to talk often informally with you, on an individual basis, about your strengths and needs for improvement. Facilitators will provide students with written formative feedback mid-quarter and will prepare consensus evaluation reports at the end of the term. The report will become a part of your PCM file and you will receive a copy. Please consider these written evaluations a basis for discussion with your facilitators if you do not understand or agree with the content. And remember that there are multiple components determining your grade in PCM.

We will also ask you to assess the small group experience and the performance of your facilitators at the end of the quarter.