



Hello admin\_tony,

Designing effective teamwork activities is a core aspect of learning design work. As employers become increasingly concerned with skills, enabling learners to work in teams is an effective way to prepare them for the demands of the workplace.



[In this week's blog post](#), Ray Martin examines the importance of helping students learn about teamwork. Leaving teamwork to chance will usually lead to disaster, and learning designers have a responsibility to incorporate activities and discussions that enable students to learn about working effectively in teams.

But while learning designers have to be able to design effective teamworking activities, they also have to be good at working in teams themselves. And nowhere is this more true than when working with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

## The importance of the SME relationship

The Ding team are currently involved in a complex build of a data programme. Those of you that know me will know that I don't know the first thing about data, but fortunately in learning design that doesn't matter. What matters is the ability to collaborate with an SME who has the subject knowledge you need.

When you're working with an SME, good teamworking skills are incredibly important. Your role is to facilitate effective discussions that enable you to develop relevant learning activities and assessment. Here are three ways in which you can do this:

- 1. Be interested.** This requires that we empathise with our SME, ask questions, listen actively, identify how a topic relates to the learning outcomes, find out how learners would use the information in a professional situation, and determine areas for further research. Your SME is an expert in their field, and they've probably spent years learning about their specialist subject. So your first job is to make them feel comfortable by asking them why they're interested in it - this will often unlock the 'why' of a topic, and help you identify reasons why other learners might be interested in it.

2. **Be outcomes-focused.** Remember that your SME has a wealth of knowledge and experience, and will happily spend hours talking about many different aspects of the topic. So your second job is to keep them focused on how a topic relates to the intended learning outcomes of the course or module you're designing, as this helps you determine the content that should be included in the curriculum. You'll also need to keep asking the SME whether the content is appropriate to the intended level of study. They might have a PhD in the subject, but the course you're designing might be for beginners or intermediate level learners. So find out what a learner at this level would be expected to know and do.
3. **Be prepared.** It's much easier to facilitate a conversation with an SME when you have an overview of the topic and a clear picture of what the course structure looks like. Start by doing your research - before you meet with your SME, find out how similar courses are constructed, and what topics they cover. Use this to inform your discussion and help you ask questions like 'do you think we should include this topic, or that topic?' If you're planning a course, it really helps to show your SME an outline of the intended course structure - for example, is it a two week, five week or ten week course? This enables you to look at the sequencing of the curriculum, and ask the SME about the order in which topics need to be covered.

If you can spare a few minutes, I'd also love to hear about your experiences of teamwork - good and bad. When have you worked in a great team, and what made it great? Or when have you had a terrible experience of teamwork, and what could have made it better? [Head over to the blog](#) and share your stories in a comment.



*[Supporting teamwork through learning design](#)*

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## Nicholas' teaching tip

In this week's teaching tip, Dr. H highlights the importance of using emotional intelligence when monitoring groups and teams to sense when all might not be going as planned.

*"If every student is different, so are groups of students. What worked with a group one year might not work with another group the following year.*

*Reflecting in action involves sensing what is working and not working, and seeing when you need to do something in a different way.*



*Whether you're a learning designer or a teacher, keep your antennae up for signs of conflict. This might be an SME talking about difficulties with a particular activity, or it might be student feedback about their experience. Look out for warning signs that a group isn't functioning as well as it might, then look at your learning design and see what you could do differently."*

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