

A TEMPLATE APPLICATION FOR MANAGING ONLINE ASSIGNMENTS

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ABSTRACT

I developed a Microsoft Windows internet-based computer application (GroupMaker) for managing online-submitted assignments that is optimized to make grading student assignments easier. The application controls student submissions with templates, is internet-based, and presents information in panels that forestall errors. Assignments can be targeted to individual, group, and section. Assignment time settings include begin, due, end, and graded. Allowed privacy settings include none, group, full, and their combinations. Students submit assignments by typing and cut-and-paste, which allows character-input limits to be enforced. A demonstration version of GroupMaker can be downloaded from <https://wp.towson.edu/precha/>.

INTRODUCTION

Consider how you grade your students. If you do it through a written exam, you use a template. Perhaps you also grade students by taking attendance, reading their papers, and listening to their presentations. In all these instances, you most likely have a template for your students. You may require that they write their initials beside their printed name on an attendance form, a required template. You may ask that their papers and presentations conform to a three-part structure, a suggested template. Templates are pervasive in grading, for they make grading easier.

GroupMaker is a Microsoft Windows computer application I developed that takes your templates, puts them online, and manages the process so that grading can be done more easily. GroupMaker is internet-based (Pillutla, 2003), not web-based, so GroupMaker directly accesses the computer's operating system. In contrast, a web-based application depends upon a browser to intercede between itself and the operating system, which means that internet-based applications respond at least as fast and generally much faster to user commands than web-based applications.

PANELS

To forestall errors, information is presented in panels where closely related items are grouped together. The Main Panel, visible to both students and instructor, is shown in Figure 1 (names appearing therein are fictitious). The instructor's Administration Panel is shown in Figure 2. The instructor controls what appears on the main panel and how the application functions through the Options Panel, Figure 3. The instructor edits student profiles through the Edit Panel, Figure 4; re-organizes group membership through the Reorganize Panel, Figure 5; and sets assignment attributes through the Set Assignment Panel, Figure 6. The instructor uses the Grade Panel, Figure 7, both to enter instructions to students accompanied by an optional template, and to score student submissions accompanied by optional comments and edits of student work.

Students use the Submit Panel, Figure 8 both to submit assignments and to see their scores and the instructor's comments and edits. Students can send instant messages to each other through the Message Box Panel, Figure 9.

ASSIGNMENT TARGETS

Instructors target assignments to one of three categories: individual, group, and section. Targeted to *individual*, each student submits an individual assignment and receives an individual score. Targeted to *group*, members of each group submit a joint assignment and every participating group member receives the same score, plus or minus instructor-specified points for specified members. Targeted to *section*, all members of the class section submit a joint assignment and every participating member receives the same score, plus or minus instructor-specified points for specified section members.

For ease in managing group and section assignments, the application considers the member who first OKs the assignment to be the assignment leader, unless the instructor decides otherwise. The application considers a member to have participated in the assignment if that member either OKs the assignment or is checked present by the leader. When the instructor enters a score for the joint assignment, the application credits all participants with the same score.

TIMES

For each assignment, the instructor sets four times: begin, due, end, and graded. The assignment is visible to the students after the *begin* time. Assignments accepted after the *due* time are flagged as late. Assignments are not accepted after the *end* time. Instructor assigned scores, optionally accompanied by comments and edits of student submissions, are visible to students after the *graded* time.

**FIGURE 1
MAIN PANEL**

Last Name	First Name	Sec	ID	Group	Location	Gender	Email
ABBIE	ZARA	T0	3	102	East of Campus	Male/O	JPETER25@STUDENTS.TOWSON.EDU
ABIGAIL	YASMIN	T0	5	115	North of Campus	Male/O	mtowle2@students.towson.edu
ADAM	XAVIER	T0	6	102	North of Campus	Male/O	cfitzg4@students.towson.edu
ADAMS	WYATT	T0	7	105	East of Campus	Male/O	dander25@students.towson.edu
ADDISON	WILLIAM	T0	8	104	North of Campus	Female	sbowma10@students.towson.edu
ADRIAN	VICTORIA	T0	9	103	On Campus/Walk to Campus	Male/O	isebas1@students.towson.edu
AIDEN	VALERIA	T0	11	103	On Campus/Walk to Campus	Male/O	mdelpi3@students.towson.edu
AIMEE	TYLER	T0	12	111	On Campus/Walk to Campus	Male/O	mbah6@students.towson.edu
ALEX	TRISTAN	T0	13	111	South of Campus	Male/O	sdacos2@students.towson.edu
ALEXA	TRINITY	T0	14	104	North of Campus	Male/O	amille88@students.towson.edu
ALEXANDER	TIA	T0	15	114	North of Campus	Female	bmaher1@students.towson.edu
ALEXANDRA	THOMAS	T0	16	114	North of Campus	Male/O	OSCAGG1@STUDENTS.TOWSON.EDU
ALEXIS	TEGAN	T0	17	114	North of Campus	Female	nscarb1@students.towson.edu
ALICE	TAYLOR	T0	18	102	South of Campus	Male/O	nbenne7@students.towson.edu
ALICIA	SYDNEY	T0	19	111	On Campus/Walk to Campus	Male/O	mlitzk1@students.towson.edu
ALISHA	SUMMER	T0	20	111	North of Campus	Male/O	bhinzm1@students.towson.edu
ALLEN	SOPHIE	T0	21	104	On Campus/Walk to Campus	Female	alatou1@students.towson.edu

Number enrolled: 54 Exiting in 234 minutes, 30 seconds. Ready

**FIGURE 2
ADMINISTRATION PANEL**

Nickname	Last Name	First Name	Sec	Group	ID	Changes	Status	Size	Location	Gender
NATHANIE	BRIANNA	NATHANIEL	T0	115	62	0	Enrolled	7	On Campus/Walk to Campus	Male/O
NELSON	BRIAN	NELSON	T0	112	61	0	Enrolled	5	East of Campus	Female
NEVAEH	BRETT	NEVAEH	T0	105	60	0	Enrolled	5	East of Campus	Male/O
NEWTON	BRAYDEN	NEWTON	T0	112	59	0	Enrolled	5	East of Campus	Male/O
NIAMH	BRANDON	NIAMH	T0	113	58	0	Enrolled	5	East of Campus	Male/O
NICHOLAS	BOOTH	NICHOLAS	T0	103	57	0	Enrolled	5	North of Campus	Female
NICOLE	BLAKE	NICOLE	T0	115	56	0	Dropped	7	South of Campus	Male/O
NOAH	BETHANY	NOAH	T0	113	55	0	Enrolled	6	North of Campus	Male/O
O'BRIEN	BENNETT	O'BRIEN	T0	113	54	0	Enrolled	6	East of Campus	Male/O
OLIVER	BENJAMIN	OLIVER	T0	113	53	0	Dropped	6	On Campus/Walk to Campus	Female
OLIVIA	BELLA	OLIVIA	T0	113	52	0	Enrolled	6	On Campus/Walk to Campus	Male/O
OSBORNE	BELL	OSBORNE	T0	115	51	0	Enrolled	5	On Campus/Walk to Campus	Male/O
O'SULLIV	BARTLETT	O'SULLIVAN	T0	103	50	0	Enrolled	5	East of Campus	Male/O
OWEN	BARNES	OWEN	T0	103	49	0	Enrolled	5	North of Campus	Female
PAIGE	BARLOW	PAIGE	T0	105	48	1	Enrolled	6	North of Campus	Male/O
PALMER	BALDWIN	PALMER	T0	104	47	1	Enrolled	5	East of Campus	Male/O

Number registered: 61

Export... Assignment... Customize... Reorganize... Options... Edit... Login... Close

**FIGURE 3
OPTIONS PANEL**

**FIGURE 4
EDIT PANEL**

**REORGANIZE PANEL
FIGURE 5**

Group	Size	Lo Prf	Hi Prf	Campus	North	South	East	West	Female	Male
102	6	4	6	0	3	1	1	1	2	
103	6	4	6	2	2	0	2	0	3	
104	6	5	7	2	2	0	2	0	4	
105	7	4	6	1	2	1	2	1	0	
111	4	5	7	2	1	1	0	0	0	
112	6	5	7	0	2	2	2	0	4	
113	6	5	6	1	3	0	2	0	1	
114	6	5	7	0	4	1	1	0	3	

**FIGURE 6
SET ASSIGNMENT PANEL**

Set Assignment

ID	To	Link	Begin	Due	End	Graded	Chars	Privacy	Share	Scroll
1A	Ind		08/28/18-10:00	09/03/18-23:59	09/07/18-23:55	09/12/18-00:08	6,000	Group	No	No
1B	Ind		08/28/18-00:00	09/06/18-10:00	09/07/18-23:55	09/12/18-00:08	4,000	Group	No	Yes
2A	Ind		09/12/18-11:00	09/17/18-23:59	09/18/18-23:59	09/26/18-23:54	3,000	Group	No	No
2B	Ind	1B	09/12/18-11:00	09/20/18-10:00	09/21/18-11:00	09/26/18-23:54	3,000	Group	No	Yes
3A	Ind		09/26/18-11:00	10/01/18-23:59	10/02/18-23:59	10/09/18-23:58	3,000	Group	No	No
3B	Ind	2B	09/26/18-11:00	10/04/18-10:00	10/04/18-14:00	10/09/18-10:59	3,000	Group	No	Yes
4A	Ind		10/11/18-11:00	10/22/18-23:59	10/23/18-23:59	11/06/18-23:58	3,000	F-600-G	No	No
4B	Ind	3B!	10/11/18-11:00	10/25/18-10:00	10/25/18-14:00	11/08/18-13:59	3,000	Group	No	Yes

ID: To: Character Limit: Copy Link From: Uneditable link (!)

Date-Time: Begin: 10/22/2018 00:00, Due: 10/22/2018 00:00, End: 10/22/2018 00:00, Graded: 10/22/2018 00:00

Add to Last, Insert Below, Days Ahead: 7, Delete, Privacy: None, Transition Minutes: 0

Grading: Sort by group, Rotate tab order, Hide group, Hide individual, Hide name,

Share comments and edits Scroll comments with submission

Submission received for Assignment 4A.

**GRADE PANEL
FIGURE 7**

Grade Individual Assignment 4B

Due 10/25/18-10:00 (Not delivered) Assignment not completed. Points:

Submission (read only) | Template

Instructions

Nintendo Case for Group Leaders (not members)

Date of case: March 3, 2017

If you are not the group leader for this week's case, skip this report; submit the previous one.

Otherwise, you are a group leader. Access and replace the Google Slides (click Access Link) for your group. You cannot replace the link. You should replace the slides of a previous case with your slides of the current case.

If you are the leader of a non-presenting group (102, 103, 105, 111, 112, 113, and 115), your assignment is to construct the slides and complete the form. Conform to the checklist in [Principles of Strategic Management, Part 4.1](#). The number of characters you have available for completing the form appears on the lower left corner of the edit box. Limit your slides to what you can present in two minutes.

-534 characters 1797 characters

PRIVACY

Privacy of assignments can be none, group, or full. *None* allows each student to view the submitted work of every other student of the same class section, *group* allows only group members to view each other's submission, and *full* allows no one to view another's submission. Three compound privacy settings are available: full-to-group, full-to-none, and group-to-none. Compound privacy settings changes assignment privacy from the more restrictive to the less restrictive at an instructor-specified interval of time after the due time.

Compound privacy settings are suitable for activities requiring separate work followed by joint work. Thus, in case analysis, students might be assigned to submit their individual analyses of the case before a group meeting to discuss the case. In this instance, the case assignment would be an individual assignment with full-to-group privacy. The due time would be an easily remembered time before the group meeting and the time for privacy to change from full to group could be the scheduled time for the start of the meeting. For example, if the group will meet at 10 a.m., the due time could be set at 12:59 p.m. of the previous day, and the interval-of-time to change from full privacy to group privacy could be set at 600 minutes past the due time. Set this way, students who miss the due time but submit their work by the schedule time of the meeting will not gain the advantage of seeing the work of their peers in advance of their own submissions. Yet, the group will not lose the advantage of seeing every member's submitted work, including work submitted late, when the group meets to discuss the case.

CHARACTER INPUT LIMIT

Penalizing students for writing too much is distasteful. For this reason, the application enforces an instructor-set character input limit on every assignment. When a student attempts to type or paste characters that exceed the limit, the excess characters are discarded.

CONCLUSION

The application makes grading student assignments easier by controlling student submissions, by responding faster to user commands, and by displaying setting in panels that forestall errors. A summary of its distinctive attributes follows:

1. **Template application.** Students fill in template-derived forms, either by typing or by cut-and-paste. They do not upload files for the instructor to download. Uploads and downloads are time consuming, require the instructor to spend time responding to errant submissions, and involve the risk of transmitting viruses.

FIGURE 8 SUBMIT PANEL

Submit Individual Assignment 4B

Due 10/25/18-10:00 (Not delivered) Assignment not completed. Ungraded

NATHANIEL BRIANNA

Submission Template (read only)

Nintendo Case for Group Leader on Non-Presenting Groups (not members)

1. In the box below, state in complete sentences your recommended strategy for the company. Be specific; use numbers. Every action that you recommend should appear here.
2. In the box below, state in complete sentences the cons and pros (cons before pros) of your recommended strategy. No action should be added here.
3. In the box below, conclude your report by summarizing your recommendation and its strongest supporting argument.

Instructions (read only)

Nintendo Case for Group Leaders (not members)

Date of case: March 3, 2017

If you are not the group leader for this week's case, skip this report; submit the previous one.

Otherwise, you a group leader. Access and replace the Google Slides (click Access Link) for your group. You cannot replace the link. You should replace the slides of a previous case with your slides of the current case.

If you are the leader of a non-presenting group (102, 103, 105, 111, 112, 113, and 115), your assignment is to construct the slides and complete the form. Conform to the checklist in [Principles of Strategic Management, Part 4.1](#). The number of characters you have available for completing the form appears on the lower left corner of the edit box. Limit your slides to what you can present in two minutes.

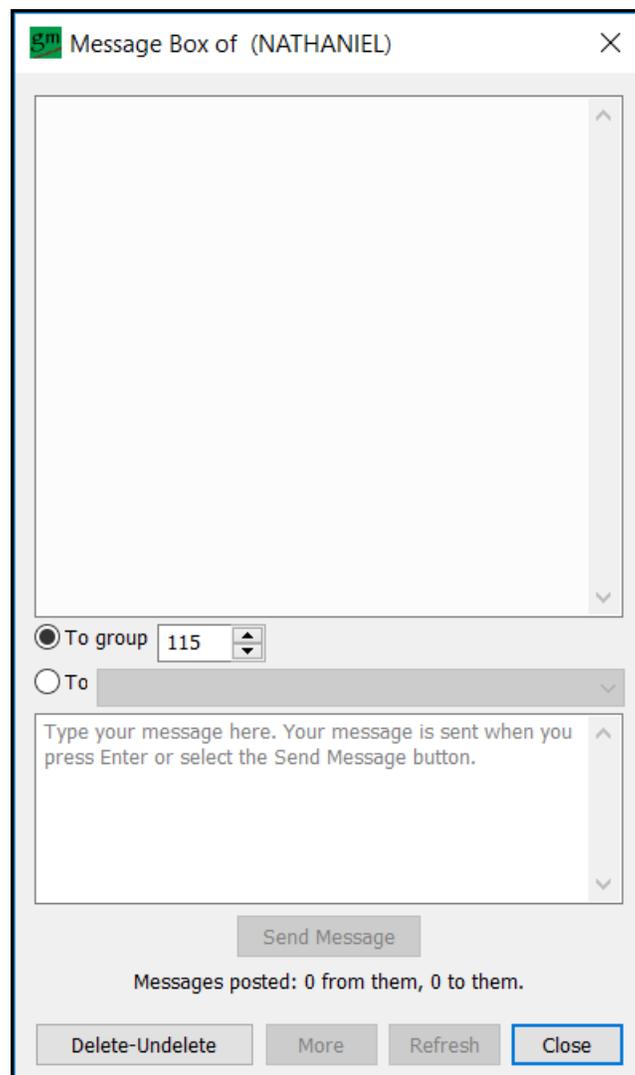
Chars available: 2466 Activate Link

Template Menu Instruction Menu Submission Menu OK Close

2. **Rapid response.** Instructors can rapidly compare submissions, comment on submissions, edit submissions, assign points, and make changes to assignments, comments, edits, and points. Rapid response is possible because the application (a) does not have to deal with the vagaries of native document files and (b) is an internet-based application with direct access to the computer's operating system.
3. **Choice of assignment target: individual, group, and section.** Individual assignments are individually completed, group assignments are jointly completed by group members, and section assignments are jointly completed by all members of a class section. Instructors can re-assign students to groups, or allow students to switch groups, between assignments.
4. **Choice of privacy settings: none, group, full, full to group, full to none, and group to none.** *None* means that every member of a class section can view the submission of every other member. *Group* means that only group members can view each other's submissions. *Full* means that no one can view another's submission. The remaining privacy settings mean that the setting changes from the more private to the less private at an instructor-specified interval of time after the due date.
5. **Character input limit.** Students are limited in the number of characters they can type or paste into forms, avoiding the issue of penalizing submissions that exceed the instructor-specified length.

A demonstration version of GroupMaker can be downloaded from <https://wp.towson.edu/precha/>. Select Downloads >> GroupMaker.

**FIGURE 9
MESSAGE BOX PANEL**



REFERENCES

- GroupMaker. [Developed by P. Thavikulwat] Towson, MD (601 Worcester Road, Towson, MD, USA). [Available from <http://wp.towson.edu/precha/>]
- Pillutla, S. (2003). Creating a Web-based simulation gaming exercise using PERL and JavaScript. *Simulation & Gaming, 34*, 112-130.