
Working in Groups: Strategies for Success

Part of the learning process in university courses involves how to work effectively in groups. Group projects in courses model real-world scenarios, so learning to be a cooperative and productive team player is a valuable skill. Some common problems when working in groups include personality clashes, misunderstanding of responsibility to the project, perceived lack of commitment from some members, and one member doing most of the work. This handout offers some helpful tips to avoid pitfalls and get the most out of group work.

1. First Meeting

- a. Ask for a volunteer to be the scribe for each meeting.
- b. Provide each other with contact information and set up a group e-mail.
- c. Develop “group rules” that discuss
 - i. Group communication
 - ii. Equal division of work;
 - iii. Expectations for participation
 - iv. Conflict resolution
 - v. Behaviours that could result in dismissal from the group
- d. Set up scheduled meeting times and places for the duration of the project.
- e. Establish goals for the project or paper.
- f. Divide the work based on
 - i. The goals that were established
 - ii. Individual strengths
 - iii. Input from each group member
- g. Set deadlines for the completion of tasks.
- h. Ask the scribe to e-mail group members a copy of the meeting minutes and task assignments.

2. Duration of the Project

General Tasks

- a. Complete your own tasks before deadlines.
- b. Help ensure ongoing communication between group members.
- c. Set an agenda for each meeting to keep everyone on track.
- d. During meetings:
 - i. Take and give constructive criticism;
 - ii. Listen with respect and wait your turn to speak;
 - iii. Be assertive, not aggressive;
 - iv. Have an open mind towards new ideas;
 - v. Do not be defensive;
 - vi. Have respect for cultural values different from your own;
 - vii. Give everyone a chance to ask questions; and

- e. Set up a meeting with the class instructor to clarify expectations of the project if group members cannot agree.

Group Papers

- a. Brainstorm as a group to decide the main points of the paper.
- b. Decide together who will be responsible for each section of the paper.
- c. Set deadlines for the draft sections.
- d. Ensure that each member uses the same citation style and submits a reference list or bibliography with their section.
- e. Have the entire paper edited for consistent voice by one member who is a proficient writer.

3. Completion of the Project

- a. If required, schedule deadlines to allow time for extra meetings.
- b. If required, decide who will submit the final copy of the paper/project for grading.
- c. If required, ensure even distribution of presentation time between group members.

4. Ensure Group Cohesion and Success

- a. Be honest with your group members.
- b. Trust the other members and yourself to get the work done.
- c. Practice fairness in the division of labour.
- d. Respect each other's needs and schedules.
- e. Practice responsibility when managing your work and personal time. By acting responsibly, you help build trust and maintain effective working relationships.

References

Carter, J, Bishop, J., Lyman Kravits, S., & Maurin, P. J. (2013). *Keys to success: Building analytical, creative, and practical skills* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Ellis, D. (2006). *Becoming a Master Student* (Canadian 4th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Hay, I., Bochner, D., Dungey, C., & Perret, N. (2012). *Making the grade: A guide to study and success* (Canadian ed.). Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Mount Royal University. (2014). *Working well in groups*. Retrieved from http://www.mtroyal.ca/AcademicSupport/ResourcesServices/StudentLearningServices/StudyingWritingEffectively/group_work.htm

University of Canberra. (2012). *Working in groups*. Retrieved from <http://www.canberra.edu.au/studyskills/learning/groups>

University of North Carolina. (2015). *Group writing*. Retrieved from <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/group-writing/>