Getting Going In Group Work

Group work combines goal setting, scheduling (time management), effective communication, leadership, collaboration, and conflict management, while enabling students to work on projects that are larger and more complex than reasonable for individual work. Working effectively as part of a group (or team) is an essential skill for both the workplace and university.

**Group Members**

Group members can be determined by the professor, randomly assigned, or chosen by students. When choosing group members, it’s important to balance areas of interest, commitment, strengths, and desired outcomes/goals for the project. While it may be tempting to immediately pair up with your friends, keep in mind that this may challenge your friendship closer to the due date.

**Initial Group Meeting**

Your initial group meeting sets the tone for subsequent meetings and work. It’s important to get off to a good start and determine how you will contact each other, when you can meet, how you will work collaboratively, and what you hope to achieve with the project.

If you don’t know everyone in the group, do a round of introductions. Select one person to be a note taker for the first meeting.

**Points to Share During the First Meeting**

- Names, NSID’s, phone numbers, and email addresses.
- Year of university, type of degree each are working toward.
- Study habits, past experiences with group work and typical communication style – do you typically finish an assignment early or pull an all-nighter handing it in just in time? Do you think as you speak or prefer to observe then speak?
- Desired grade or goal for the project, term, or your degree. It’s important to have a conversation during the first meeting to lay out each person’s expectations and priorities. Once you know personal goals, as a group you can determine an overall goal for the project. This will reduce potential conflict.
- 1 or 2 strengths and weaknesses (e.g., strong grammar skills, experience with leading a group, weak organizational skills, struggle with note taking). The strength and weakness should relate to either group work or the project at hand.

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Discussions and Decisions as a Group During the First Meeting

Establishing a solid framework and making clear decisions as a group before you begin your project or assignment will help everyone to focus on the collaboration aspect of group work.

- **Select a group identifier or project name** to be used to identify your group/project. Appoint a group member to liaise with the professor/instructor.

- Develop a solid understanding of the **project requirements and due date**.

- Allocate **roles for each person at meetings** (e.g., facilitator, note taker, progress tracker, time keeper, mediator, challenger, summarizer). Note that all roles interconnect. Assign the first week roles based on strengths and desired roles, and alternate roles in following weeks to give everyone a chance to develop these skills.

- Set up a **schedule of weekly meetings** (in person, Skype, online).

- Agree upon a **method of online collaboration**. Decide how group members will communicate, be it through email or an online document/project management system.

- Create a set of **group norms** (e.g., cell phones off during meetings, only one person talks at a time, listen to understand).

- Discuss how **group challenges** such as disagreements, lack of communication and lack of participation should be handled.

- **Break the project down into smaller tasks**, determining which tasks can be completed individually, as a group, online or need to have group meetings to facilitate.

- **Allocate tasks to individuals** based on current strengths and skills, and strengths and skills each person wants to develop. Try to keep the amount of work evenly distributed.

- **Create a project schedule**, setting due dates for each task. Leave at least a week before the project due date to combine the parts, verify data, proofread and edit.

**Together, A Group Can Achieve More!**