

A guide to group and team work

What's the difference?

In Group work students work together on the same task but submit separate assignments.

In Team work students share the work and submit a single team assignment.

Advantages

- A team can produce a more comprehensive or complex piece of work
- Individuals learn more by working with others
- Group and team work develops excellent graduate attributes:
 - decision making and problem solving skills
 - project management and organisational skills
 - interpersonal, communication and conflict resolution skills

Difficulties

- You can't work as quickly as you can by yourself
- Group/team members may have conflicting ideas or viewpoints
- Group/team members may not contribute equally

You need to

- be patient, demonstrate good communication skills and be committed
- focus on the process rather than just the product

The Process

1. Build a strong foundation

- Get to know your group/team members' backgrounds, interests and personalities
- Discuss work styles and individual strengths and weaknesses. This will help you formulate objectives and allocate tasks appropriately.
- Meet as early as possible and set rules for the group/team

2. Agree on the goals

It is important that everyone is working towards the same goal. Make sure you agree on:

- the aims and scope of the project
- the quality of the end product

If you don't understand something about the task, say it now.

3. Organise the group/team, organise the work

- Exchange contact details and create an email list
- Decide how to communicate (e.g. text, email) and collaborate (e.g. Google Docs)
- Clearly define the tasks involved; agree on the focus, content and scope of each
- Prioritise tasks, allocate responsibilities evenly and agree on due-dates
- Set early due-dates to allow for emergencies
- Plan how you will collectively collate and edit your assignment to present a single, unified project rather than a collection of separate elements



Tips for success

Conduct meetings productively

- Make sure everyone knows the agenda: what is to be achieved in the meeting
- Make sure everyone knows what they are expected to prepare, present, or bring
- Have a chairperson to keep the meeting on track
- Have a minute-taker to record decisions and next steps

Maintain relationships

Relationships are the key to the success of a project, so be prepared to invest time and energy in developing and maintaining them. Remember that people have very different modes of interacting in groups or teams, depending on their social and cultural backgrounds.

Tips for handling conflict:

- Agree on a strategy at the outset for dealing with people who are too domineering or who don't do their share of the work
- In your negotiations, separate the person from the problem. Don't let your opinion of the person cloud your opinion of their ideas, and don't make a criticism of their ideas sound like a criticism of their personality!
- Try to put yourself in their shoes and see their perspective. This might give you a better idea of how best to deal with the situation.
- Be prepared to renegotiate things you established at the outset to suit the evolving needs and aims of the group/team
- Resolve problems as a group/team and avoid excluding individuals
- Address issues and concerns as they arise

Leadership

Means

Helping the group/team decide how to work efficiently

Monitoring progress in relation to the intended plan

Knowing when a group/team member needs help

Keeping the group/team motivated

Does NOT mean

Doing all the work

Making decisions and telling others what to do

Being solely responsible for the success or failure of the project

Responsibility

Who is responsible for the success or failure of the project or assignment?

The leader 

Other team members 

Everyone 

Where to go for help

Faculty staff: tell your tutor or lecturer immediately if any issues are preventing the group/team from working effectively – don't wait until the assignment is due.

Library Learning Skills Advisers can facilitate a group planning session for you.

Counselling and Mental Health <http://www.monash.edu.au/counselling> can assist you with approaches in dealing with problems you might encounter in your group or team.