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WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

Future Students   **Students**   **International**   **Research**   **Alumni**   **MyWestern**

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MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Mental Health & Wellbeing

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Group work at university

Group work requires students to use collaboration, communication, and leadership skills to solve problems or develop assessment items like papers or presentations. These skills are important not just for success in studies but are also essential skills for succeeding in your career and future endeavours. Working in groups allows students to accomplish more than they could have done alone- group work can pose challenges, but with the right resources you can set yourself up for success both in your studies and your future career.

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About group work

The benefits of group work

[When completing assessments](#), research has shown that students learning through group work were able to learn things more easily, better remember what they had learned, and were better at problem solving and reasoning. Group work gives students opportunities to take on more complex problems than they could tackle alone, meaning they can learn things together that they can't learn alone, and provides more opportunities for critical thinking.

[When students work together](#), the act of working together allows them to learn valuable group work skills. Group work gives the opportunity to gain skills in:

- Communication
- Negotiation
- Interpersonal skills
- Conflict management
- Time and resource management
- Goal setting and planning skills

The challenges of group work

Even an effective group will have disagreements. All groups go through the four stages of:

- **Forming:** Getting to know one another, the task, and setting the ground rules.
- **Storming:** Conflict, disagreement or criticism as the group establishes itself.
- **Norming:** Group members have overcome conflict/disagreement. Communication is positive and the group is more productive.
- **Performing:** The group works together to achieve its objectives. However, depending on the situation you may have to revisit the storming stage to resolve issues.

Problems occur when these stages are incomplete, and conflict is unresolved. For more information about each of these stages, see [this resource](#).

Strategies for group work

Elements of an effective group

It's important for all group members to have a role and know what their responsibilities in the group are. These roles will vary depending on how big the group is and what the goals are.

Some [helpful group roles](#) to assign include:
- **Facilitator or leader** who helps keep meetings on track
- **Note taker** who ensures ideas, decisions and responsibilities are recorded
- **Timekeeper** who is in charge of time management
- **Progress chaser** who monitors deadlines and goals, making sure that tasks happen when they need to
- **Process watcher** is responsible for monitoring process, rather than content, which can be helpful for identifying problems
- **Editor** who assists to bring everyone's contributions together and find gaps

You can rotate through the roles- the most important part is to be clear about responsibilities.

[Successful teamwork](#) tends to happen when team members:
- Share goals
- Trust, respect and support each other
- Feel safe to communicate their ideas
- Pay attention to people skills like reading how people feel through nonverbal signs

Completing a [team charter](#) together can help a group clarify expectations, share necessary information, and prepare ahead of time to manage conflict that may arise.

Steps to completing a project

The [WSU Library Teamwork guide](#) outlines the steps of project management needed to complete a project together:

1. Define what will be created as part of the project, and how you will know your team has achieved the project objectives
2. Break the project into small, manageable tasks.
3. Estimate how long each task will take.
4. Plan the order in which to do the tasks. (Some tasks cannot be started until another one is completed, while some tasks can be done at the same time.)
5. Allocate tasks.

6. Track progress of tasks.
7. Adjust project plan if tasks are running behind schedule.

Managing group work challenges

Most problems arise when the elements and behaviours of an effective group are missing (or not followed). This can cause:

- **A lack of direction**. Often if a group doesn't have agreed ground rules, defined tasks, and a timeline, then they can spend too much time discussing the problem rather than solving it. If this is happening in your group, try and bring the group together and formalise what you are doing. WSU has a handy template [here](#).

If you are unsure about your task, then speak up – don't waste time. If you aren't comfortable speaking with the group, approach someone you trust and seek clarification. It is important you understand what is expected of you and if the task is too difficult then your team should be able to assist you.

- **Problems with group discussions.** Some people might take control of the group by talking too often, asserting superiority, or not letting others finish. Others may rarely speak because they have difficulty getting in the conversation (especially if using an additional language). To address these problems, you may:
    - Consider the different ways of working - Would quieter members like time to process information before the meeting.
    - Take action to manage relationships - point out everyone needs to be heard, allocate speaking times, acknowledge everyone's contribution is valued (even if you don't agree with them), give people time to think, ask questions, then respond.
- **Conflict/ disagreement.** Unfortunately, and despite your best efforts, conflict is a normal part of working in a team. Conflict must be addressed. Depending on the issue you may speak to an individual member or bring the group together. Remember:
- **Remain objective** - Focus on the problem, not the person.
- **Listen** - acknowledge and respect everyone's experience and opinion. Give everyone the chance to be heard without judgment or interruption.
- **Collaborate** – Brainstorm possible solutions
- **Decide** – negotiate, and if required compromise, to decide on a solution the group agrees with.
- **A failure to contribute.** There are many reasons why people don't contribute. If you have concerns, contact the group member directly. Ask non- confrontational questions to identify if there are any concerns with the task, workload, or other challenges like illness or carer responsibilities. It is important not to make assumptions. However, repeated non-compliance is unacceptable, and if speaking to the individual doesn't have any impact, you may want to speak with your lecturer or subject coordinator.

Please Note: WSU has clear misconduct guidelines. If you believe the issues you are experiencing in your group constitute bullying, harassment or other misconduct please contact your Subject Coordinator or the WSU Counselling Service for support.

Group work and my studies

WSU Library Study Smart has resources available to support group work including topics such as:
- Group work 101
- Communication and conflicts
- Templates for assigning tasks and establishing the ground rules.

University support

If you are experiencing difficulties with your studies or would like support, WSU Counselling Service, Disability Service, or Welfare Service may be able to help.

- **WSU Counselling Service.**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or phone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370. Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30pm. Alternatively, or email counselling@westernsydney.edu.au

- **WSU Disability Service.**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an Academic Integration Plan (AIP), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email disability@westernsydney.edu.au or make contact via WesternNow.

- **WSU Welfare Service.**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via WesternNow.

- **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402771543 or email d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au.

- **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

- **Disruption to Studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

- **Deferred Exams**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

- **Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

- **Leave of absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant census date

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the counselling service for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).

Community support

- **Lifeline**

Lifeline (24 hours crisis counselling) - **13 11 14**
Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text **0477 13 11 14** and somebody will text you back! You can find more information [here](#).

- **Mental Health Telephone Access Line**

Available 24/7 to everyone in NSW on **1800 011 511**. Provides professional help and advice and referrals to local mental health services.

- **Find a public library in NSW**

When working with other students, local libraries may be a convenient place to meet in person as a group, particularly if the group members live closer to a local library than a WSU campus library.

Resources

- Websites
- Podcasts
- Videos
- Apps

Websites

Student email is a great way to keep in touch with other team members.

Google Drive and **Google Docs** are a helpful tool for sharing files and collaboratively working on tasks.

Trello is a project management tool for groups to use together and can be helpful for seeing who has been assigned what tasks, and where everyone is up to.

Students have access via their university account to Zoom, which can be a great way to meet virtually.

Podcasts

"The Introvert's Guide to... Group Work"

In this episode, group work is discussed in a school and work setting, providing tips and tricks on how to get through it.

https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-introverts-guide-to-group-work/id1378152601?i=1000433631485

https://open.spotify.com/episode/1PYD9LA3qCFfn8tcusY5MG?si=83aeb1ac1f814b97

Videos

Secrets of successful teamwork: Insights from Google

Yak's guide to group assignments

Apps

Each of the website resources mentioned above are available for both Apple and Android mobile devices:

Google Drive app

Google Docs on Apple and Android

Zoom app

Trello app

Still struggling?

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU counselling team for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a **Mental Health Care Plan** and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional.

Please find the attached PDF document here.

References

[Washington University in St. Louis – Benefits of Group Work](#)

[UNSW – Guide to Group Work](#)

[Monash University – Learning Effectively Through Groupwork](#)