Project management

Managing a group project

Coordinating a small or large group of people with busy lives and study loads on a single project can be a daunting task. Humanity did manage, however, to make it to the moon and back before the internet and the advent of online creative and collaborative platforms. So, if you're feeling overwhelmed, concentrate on what you *can* do in clear, simple, and basic terms.

Roles

It's important to give everyone in the group a role. The types of roles will vary depending on the size of the group and the task, but some options include chair, note taker, and timekeeper, or alternatively president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. Or maybe your group will divide responsibility for different parts of the task so that you have, for example, a writer, an editor, a researcher, a graphics designer, and a presenter.

Activity

Think about each of the responsibilities outlined below for the different roles in a team. Which role do you think you would be best at? Why?

Role	Responsibilities
Chair	→ Sets the agenda → Guides the group through the agenda → Summarises discussion and decisions → Helps the group decide how much time to allocate to agenda items
Note taker	→ Keeps a record of decisions, assigned tasks, etc. → Makes an outline of notes after each meeting → Sends a copy of the notes to each team member
Progress chaser	→ Makes sure everyone in the group stays on track → Identifies potential problems and makes sure any gaps are filled → Reports at the beginning of each meeting 'where the team is at'
Time keeper	→ Keeps the group to an agreed-upon schedule → Alerts the group to timeframes, e.g. 'We allocated 15 minutes to this discussion and we have five minutes left to finish.'

You can rotate roles so that everyone gets a go – just make sure it's clear who is responsible for what and when. You might like to think about what you're good at when considering what role to take. Do you like to lead? Be the chair. Do you find yourself going quiet in large groups? Volunteer to take notes so that you're still involved.

Tackling the task

Once you've got your group together and you've allocated roles, keep the good work going by setting some goals or rules. Discuss when, where, and how often you'll meet, and how much notice needs to be given before missing a meeting. You might talk about how you will make decisions or handle conflict.

You and your group should analyse the task together (PDF, 236 kB) and come up with an action plan. Carefully read the task description, criteria, and expectations. What do you need to do? How will you be assessed? What is the deadline?

Assigning tasks

You then need to break down the task into smaller activities, and assign them to each person. Or your group might decide instead to divide the task between you, so that for example one person researches, another writes, and another person presents.

Activity: Group work, task allocation

As a group, list all the jobs that need to be done, and estimate the time for each job. Make sure you break bigger tasks down into smaller, manageable ones. Then decide who will do which task.

What needs doing?	How long will it take?	Who will do it?

You can download a full-page PDF of this table (PDF, 24 kB) and use it with your group.

Make sure everyone has something to do and make clear who is responsible for what. Exchange contact info and keep in touch. Also be prepared to negotiate conflicts within the team – see Communication and conflicts (PDF, 69 kB).

Need a place to meet? You can book a Library group study room at a campus that suits your group.

Keeping records

Keep copies of your notes, your writing at all stages, and any important emails or messages. Make sure everyone in the group is updated if and when things change, like when someone writes a new draft of the report. If it isn't in writing, then it didn't happen.