



Group work 101

What is group work?

Group work is an assessment that requires a single submission by more than one person. Some assessments will have multiple components which may include a group work component and then an individual component.

Why should I do group work?

Working as a group on a project or assignment gives you have the opportunity to draw on the different strengths of group members. The idea is that your group will produce a more extensive and higher quality project or assignment than you could complete on your own. There are two ways that you benefit from engaging in group work assessments:

1. you think more carefully about your own ideas so that you can explain them to others; and
2. you expand your knowledge and skills by taking account of the knowledge and skills of others.

What are the components of a group work?

Group work is designed to improve skills in two main areas: interpersonal skills, and process management skills.

Interpersonal skills

- Building positive working relationships
- Communicating effectively in with a diverse group of individuals
- Developing negotiation skills to agree on tasks and resolve conflicts
- Accommodating people with different cultural orientations, special needs, and work habits

Ice breaker activities and the getting to know you phase is very important. Do not skip over these things to get to work because the time spent early on these activities will enhance team relationships and communication which will payoff later. It is important that everyone feels like an important member of the team.

Process management skills

- Identification of group goals and division of work
- Planning and complying with meeting schedules and deadlines
- Managing your time to meet group expectations
- Monitoring group processes and appropriately intervening to correct problems in a timely manner

Draw up team contracts that everyone has input into and ensure that everyone signs. Ensure that responsibilities including their role in the team, the work they are expected to produce, and deadlines are included. Touches like these make people feel responsible to every other member of the team. It also gives you a record if things go wrong.

How can I manage group work effectively?

Even with good negotiation skills, managing group work can be difficult. Following these 9 steps will help you to manage group work more effectively:

1. Have clear objectives that are shared by the whole team.
2. Set ground rules that are agreed to with input from the whole team.
3. Communicate efficiently, possibly even developing a plan for communication.
4. Ensure a shared vision for the project that includes the ideas of everyone in the team.
5. Define and negotiate roles, and assign tasks with appropriate deadlines for every member of the team.
6. Ensure that all decisions are clearly understood by every member of the team.
7. Keep good records at meetings and ensure that you use a communication medium that creates a paper trail.
8. Stick to the plan no matter what, or ensure that any necessary changes to the plan are again agreed to by the entire team.
9. Monitor progress of everyone in the team and ensure that everyone is sticking to their deadlines.