

SKILLS FOR LEARNING

GUIDE TO GROUP WORK

WHAT IS GROUP WORK?

Group work at University is any activity that involves working with others such as seminars, group projects, and contributing to online discussions. Group work can be course work which is assessed or less formal non-assessed activities.

WHY IS GROUP WORK IMPORTANT?

Group work provides students with an opportunity:

- to work with other students to develop ideas
- to improve their listening and speaking skills
- to contribute to a common goal

These communication and collaboration skills are some of the key skills required in the workplace.

WHICH SKILLS ARE REQUIRED FOR SUCCESSFUL GROUP WORK?

Successful group work requires both interpersonal and organisational skills. Interpersonal skills such as active listening, and understanding others strengths and weaknesses, will help to create a positive environment where all group members feel able to contribute. Good interpersonal skills also help to ensure that the group works smoothly and avoids conflict.

Organisational skills such as timetabling, record keeping, communication and using the appropriate technology will provide a framework to enable the group to successfully complete the assignment.

AVOIDING COLLUSION

The University regards collusion as academic misconduct and it is important to understand what collusion is and how to avoid it. Collusion is when two or more students work together on a piece of work which should have been completed individually. When carrying out a piece of group work it is especially important that you know if you are being assessed as an individual or as a group. Your assignment briefing documents will help you to understand which parts of the project can be tackled collaboratively and which cannot. If you are unsure you should check with your tutor. Clear and accurate record keeping will enable individual contributions to be tracked.

TOP TIPS FOR GROUP WORK:

1. **Have some ground rules** these can be formal or informal but they should set out the minimum expected level of participation. Set the ground rules at the beginning of the project, then group members are clear what is expected of them and how the group will deal with any difficulties.

2. **Be clear about the task** you have to do. Make sure that everyone understands the assignment and how the group is going to approach it. Having a clear understanding of the task means that you can then set achievable targets and deadlines, helping to ensure that the group can progress at a reasonable rate.
3. **Be aware of the strengths and weakness** of the individuals that make up your group.
4. **Allocate tasks** so all group members are happy with the task they have been given. There are two ways to decide on task allocation. Firstly tasks are allocated based on an individual's expertise or experience and the second is that team members are given tasks that allow them to learn and develop new skills. In practice you are likely to use a mixture of these two methods.
5. **Make use of appropriate technology** to help you communicate, plan and record your activities. Tools such as Google docs, PebblePad, and Wikis all provide ways of supporting your group work.
6. **Be confident in expressing your opinions** but also be encouraging when others express theirs.
7. **Ensuring that all members of the group contribute equally** can be difficult. Some people will take on tasks very quickly, while others will for a variety of reasons be more reluctant to do so. Try to ensure that tasks have been fairly allocated. Keeping accurate records can help everyone have a realistic awareness of their own and others contribution. Making sure that everyone's efforts are acknowledged is another way to encourage all group members to participate.
8. **Working with a person you do not like** is challenging but in group work you have to work with many different personalities. Having good ground rules and clear communication should ensure that the project runs smoothly so there is less likelihood of confrontation. It also helps if you can concentrate on the tasks you need to complete rather than individual personalities in the group.

HELP AND ADVICE

For help and advice on group work, please see the Skills for Learning website at <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/skills>.

FURTHER READING

Books offering advice on group work are available in the Study Skills collections in the Learning Centres and as part of our e-book collection.



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