

WORKING IN GROUPS: A QUICK GUIDE FOR STUDENTS #1

Getting Started

1. Groups work best if people know each others' names and a bit of their background and experience, especially those parts that are related to the task at hand. Take time to introduce yourselves
2. Be sure to include everyone when considering ideas about how to proceed as a group. Some may never have participated in a small group in an academic setting. Others may have ideas about what works well. Allow time for people to express their inexperience and hesitations as well as their experience with group projects.
3. Most groups select a leader early on, especially if the work is a long-term project. Other options for leadership in long-term projects include taking turns for different works or different phases of the work.
4. Everyone needs to discuss and clarify the goals of the group's work. Go around the group and hear everyone's ideas (before discussing them) or encourage divergent thinking by brainstorming. If you miss this step, trouble may develop part way through the project. Even though time is scarce and you may have a big project ahead of you, groups may take some time to settle in to work. If you anticipate this, you may not be too impatient with the time it takes to get started.

Organizing the Work

5. Break up big jobs into smaller pieces. Allocate responsibility for different parts of the group project to different individuals or teams. Do not forget to account for assembling pieces into final form.

6. Develop a time-line, including who will do what, in what format, by when. Include time at the end for assembling pieces into final form. (This may take longer than you anticipate.) At the end of each meeting, individuals should review what work they expect to complete by the following session.

Understanding and Managing Group Processes

7. Groups work best if everyone has a chance to make strong contributions to the discussion at meetings and to the work of the group project.

8. At the beginning of each meeting, decide what you expect to have accomplished by the end of the meeting.

9. Someone (probably not the leader) should write all ideas, as they are suggested, on the board or on large sheets of paper. Designate a recorder of the group's decisions. Allocate responsibility for group process (especially if you do not have a fixed leader) such as a time manager for meetings and someone who periodically says that it is time to see how things are going (see below).

10. Save some time toward the end of the first meeting (and periodically as the group continues) to check in with each other on how the process is working:
 - o What leadership structure does the group want - one designated leader? rotating leaders? separately assigned role.

Are any more ground rules needed, such as starting meetings on time, kinds of interruptions allowed, and so forth?

Is everyone contributing to discussions? Can discussions be managed differently so all can participate? Are people listening to each other and allowing for different kinds of contributions?

Are all members accomplishing the work expected of them? Is there anything group members can do to help those experiencing difficulty?

Are there disagreements or difficulties within the group that need to be addressed?

(Is someone dominating? Is someone left out?)

Is outside help needed to solve any problems?

Is everyone enjoying the work?

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