

Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard University | ONLINE DOCUMENT
WORKING IN GROUPS: A QUICK GUIDE FOR STUDENTS #2
Including Everyone and Their Ideas

Groups work best if everyone is included and everyone has a chance to contribute ideas. The group's task may seem overwhelming to some people, and they may have no idea how to go about accomplishing it. To others, the direction the project should take may seem obvious. The job of the group is to break down the work into chunks, and to allow everyone to contribute. The direction that seems obvious to some may turn out not to be so obvious after all. In any event, it will surely be improved as a result of some creative modification.

Encouraging Ideas

The goal is to produce as many ideas as possible in a short time without evaluating them. All ideas are carefully listened to but not commented on and are usually written on the board or large sheets of paper so everyone can see them, and so they don't get forgotten or lost.

Take turns by going around the group - hear from everyone, one by one

Generate ideas through brainstorming - people mention ideas in any order (without others' commenting, disagreeing or asking too many questions). The advantage of brainstorming is that ideas do not become closely associated with the individuals who suggested them. This process encourages creative thinking, if it is not rushed and if all ideas are written down (and therefore, for the time-being, accepted). A disadvantage: when ideas are suggested quickly, it is more difficult for shy participants or for those who are not speaking their native language. One approach is to begin by brainstorming and then go around the group in a more structured way asking each person to add to the list.

1. Examples of what to say:

Why don't we take a minute or two for each of us to present our views?

Let's get all our ideas out before evaluating them. We'll clarify them before we organize or evaluate them.

We'll discuss all these ideas after we hear what everyone thinks.

You don't have to agree with her, but let her finish.

Let's spend a few more minutes to see if there are any possibilities we haven't thought of, no matter how unlikely they seem.

Parts adapted and quoted from the following training materials:
Heller Hunt and Cunningham. "Advanced Facilitator" Brookline, MA 1992
Interaction Associates. "Collaborative Problem Solving" Cambridge, MA 1987

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**Derek Bok Center for
Teaching and Learning
Harvard University**

Science Center 318
One Oxford Street
Cambridge, MA 02138-2901
Voice: (617) 495-4869 * Fax: (617) 495-
3739
http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~bok_cen