

Group Work

Group work helps develop your communication and team-working skills. Assignments that are collaborative can also be a little easier because the responsibility and workload is shared amongst the group. However, a lack of communication and collaboration can lead to more stress and a project that doesn't live up to its potential. Here is a guide on how to effectively work in a group, as well as some tips.

The key to good teamwork is good communication, and good communication involves two main things; **Active Listening** and **Enthusiastic Discussion**.

- **Active Listening:**
 - Make sure you pay attention when someone else is talking, engaging with them.
 - Even when you disagree with someone, make sure you hear them out and are open-minded about onboarding other people's ideas.
- **Enthusiastic Discussion:**
 - To come to a conclusion everyone is happy with, ensure you have a discussion where everyone gets an opportunity to talk and is heard.
 - This might mean taking a step back if you are a louder voice, or pushing to join the conversation if you are a quieter voice.
 - You may have differing opinions on and approaches to the project, but it is important to work together to produce a project you are all happy to contribute to.

It is also important to plan out and agree on the logistics in your first meeting. This will help streamline the rest of the process and make it easier to communicate with each other. This might involve sorting out the following:

- Arranging group meetings ahead of time
 - Using polls (such as Doodle) are helpful for documenting what time everyone is free and available to meet.
 - Consider whether a physical or online meeting is best for you.

- A physical meeting might make it easier to listen and talk, for discussion to flow easily.
- A digital meeting might be easier as far as accessibility needs are concerned if someone is ill, injured, or has caring responsibilities.
- What to go through in your first meeting
 - Come up with a topic and a plan of action you all agree on.
 - Divide the tasks equally between the members.
 - Set up a tracker document (this can be a simple table in Word or Excel) to help keep track of tasks, who's doing them and if/when they are done.
 - Decide what platform you are using to make this project.
 - A Video Essay - recording on one phone and then editing via an online software that is easier and accessible (such as CapCut, Canva or iMovie)
 - Presentation - Google Docs, Canva, Prezi or a shared Powerpoint
 - Digital Zine/Poster/Creative Project - Canva or Prezi
 - Ensure that everyone has access to shared planning and project documents.
 - Decide how you will communicate.
 - This might be through an email chain, a Whatsapp group, a Teams Meeting group or other messaging platforms.

Before your first meeting, you may want to look at the details of the assignment so you can start thinking ahead. Here are some things to keep an eye out for:

- What is the expectation for you as an individual and also for the group as a whole?
 - How is it graded?
 - What is the expectation for how the work will be divided?
 - How much of an input will the tutor have? (This is usually very little)
- What is the objective of the project?
- What content do you need to include in the project?
 - Is there a criteria you can follow?
 - Is there anything absolutely imperative you include?
 - What other desirable contents could you add?

Throughout the process, you may have moments where you disagree, and this could escalate, leading to unhelpful confrontations. Here are some ways to avoid this:

- Try not to use inherently negative language.
 - If you dislike someone's contribution, first think whether it has any real impact on the project.
 - If it does, try to raise the matter in a calm way, offering your opinion on what you think doesn't work, and a possible solution to help you both reach an agreement.
- Try not to use confrontational language.
 - This can mean adding 'I feel' to the beginning of statements, so that no one feels as if they are being individually blamed for something.
 - It also means that you are communicating with each other on a genuine basis to find a solution, as opposed to blaming each other for different problems, causing the rift to grow larger.
- Aside from being an active listener, ensure you are also using non-verbal communication to support and engage with your teammates.

If you do run into bigger problems, here are some ways you could possibly resolve them:

- If you find yourselves disagreeing, talk out your points of view early on to stop the problem from escalating.
- If anyone feels left out in the group, reach out to them and work collaboratively with them, making sure everyone feels included and like their contribution is valid.

If you feel someone is not contributing to the project as much as others are, there are a couple ways to deal with this:

- Firstly, are they doing this for a valid reason? Have they suffered an injury, loss or any other major life event that may be impacting their ability to participate?
- Keep communication channels open so that everyone, including this person, can reach out and be honest if they need any help with their section.
- If the issue persists without any apparent reason, speak to your tutors for further guidance.

Once you have done the bulk of your projects, here are some things to check:

- Agree on a writing/presentation style.
- Agree on a referencing style (and keep it consistent throughout).
- Agree on standardisation for the final document (this includes font, font size, line spacing, etc.)
- Make sure you all proofread the final product and make any edits necessary.

If you are doing a presentation, here are a few things to do before the final presentation:

- Decide the order of your speakers.
- Practice the speed, style and cadence so everyone is similar.
- Practice transitions between speakers and between slides of your presentation.
- Make sure you time a full run through and ensure it is within the expected range.

Hopefully this guide has helped you navigate group projects. Here are a final few things to remember:

- Check the deadline and work as in advance as you possibly can.
- Ensure there is no plagiarism or use of AI (unless you are explicitly granted permission to use it). Academic integrity is shared in projects like these and can cost multiple people their grades.
- Remember this is only one out of your other assignments and that while you should try your best, it is not the end all be all of your degree.