Effective Group Work

Getting Started

While working in a group on an assignment, you may find yourself collaborating with students who have different expectations or work habits. This can result in an unfair distribution of work, group members working mainly on their own, or even conflict. Below are some tips on starting a group assignment on the right foot, avoiding some common mistakes, and dealing effectively with conflict.

This brochure offers some tips for your first meeting as a group:

**Plan how you’ll communicate**
Set up meeting times, exchange contact information, and define expectations for group meetings.

**Review the assignment together**
Make sure everyone has the same understanding of the work to be produced.

**Assign specific roles and tasks to each member to keep the team organized**, for example, project manager, editor, researcher(s), writer(s), etc. (University of Waterloo: Learning Services, n.d.)

**Create a schedule** with agreed-upon deadlines to hold teammates accountable.

Benefits of Group Work

Group work is commonly assigned in college. Whether you choose your groupmates or not, working in a group offers many opportunities for learning and development. For instance, group work can help you:

- Build relationships
- Plan and manage your time
- Expand your understanding through discussion and explanation
- Develop stronger communication skills
- Delegate roles and responsibilities
- Develop new approaches to resolving differences
- Obtain social support and encouragement

(Carnegie Mellon University: Eberly Center, 2016, para. 5-7)

Academic Integrity

Honesty, Trust, Fairness, Respect, Responsibility, Courage
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Do

Clarify assignment expectations, such as which parts of the assignment require collaboration. Collaborating on work that’s meant to be done individually is a breach of academic integrity.

Divide the work into tasks
Make big decisions together, but create tasks that will allow group members to work on their own.

Create a shared list
Keep track of each group member’s tasks to ensure each person contributes equally.

Hold brainstorming sessions
as a group to maintain momentum and keep everyone up to-date.

Don’t

Take problems directly to your professor before trying to work them out first within the group.

Move ahead on the assignment without your group’s input.
In cases where your group is unresponsive, moving ahead on your own can make group members feel unheard, cause conflict and ultimately create work you’ll have to redo.

Assign unclear or unbalanced roles among your team.
Giving one person too much responsibility can cause conflict and slow down progress. Instead, everyone should have a fair workload that suits their strengths.

Avoid Common Pitfalls

- **Disagreements** can make the process difficult if they are frequent or emotionally charged. Try to stay emotionally detached from your work, and find common ground between opposing ideas.

- Handle **over-controlling group members** by reminding the group that everyone’s input matters. Make space for other group members to give input.

- Handle **inactive group members** by addressing the problem directly. Find out why the group member is having difficulty contributing and address the issue as a group respectfully (University of Melbourne, n.d.).

Group Work Beyond College

Learning to work well with others on assigned tasks extends beyond college. For instance, did you know that an estimated 80% of all employees work within teams (Caroselli, 1998)? Completing projects in groups is an important skill not only for learning while in college, but a crucial skill required after graduation as well.
Resources

Tutoring Centre
The Tutoring Centre offers tutoring in many different subjects and can help you prepare effectively for tests and assignments. Visit the Tutoring Centre:

- **Davis** – Room J104
- **Davis** – A208d (Trades Math)
- **HMC** – Room A118B
- **HMC** – Room B492 (Architecture & Design Only)
- **Trafalgar** – Room C113

Email: tutoring@sheridancollege.ca

Library and Learning Services:
Librarians provide citation and research assistance. As well, the library provides many resources to support your learning as well as group study rooms. Visit the library at:

- **Davis** - J-Wing
- **HMC** - A-Wing
- **Trafalgar** - C-Wing

Email: library@sheridancollege.ca

Academic Integrity Office
The Academic Integrity Office provides education, resources and support to foster the understanding and practice of academic integrity at Sheridan.

Visit the Academic Integrity Office at

- **Davis** - Davis J214l
- **HMC** - HMC A211
- **Trafalgar** - C151a

E-mail: aif@sheridancollege.ca

References

