Working Effectively in Groups

It can be exciting to form groups to complete a project, especially when you have a group full of friends. However, sometimes gaining support and cooperation from all of the group members can prove to be challenging! Some group members are unwilling to accept responsibility, while others are dominant and pushy. This kind of co-operation within the group can have adverse effects on your performance in the project. Unfortunately, this is so common that you are likely to find yourself facing similar situations in your future career.

This resource provides some tips to help you work effectively in groups.

When working in groups, it is important to foster the 5R’s:

| Responsibility | Contribute as much as you can  
| Complete the work assigned to you |
| Reliance | Help each other to:  
| Learn from the project  
| Complete the project |
| Relationship | Encourage each other to:  
| Share information  
| Exchange viewpoints  
| Discuss learning strategies  
| Form good partnerships  
| Show acceptance to different personalities |
| Respect | Be sensitive to each other’s”  
| Needs  
| Feelings  
| Positions  
| Be devoted to the project |
| Reflection | Be aware:  
| How much progress the group has made  
| How much have you contributed to the group  
| How well you have communicated with the members  
| How well the project has been done |

Tips for Working Effectively in Groups

Assign Roles and Define Responsibilities
In order to work effectively in groups, assigning roles and the division of work is important. The following list can be a starting place for assigning roles to suit your group’s needs.


1. Leader
   - Leads discussion with open-ended questions
   - Encourages all group members
   - Facilitates brainstorming by summarizing and clarifying group comments
   - Helps guide conversation and focuses on positive statements
   - Checks for consensus or questions from group members

2. Organizer
   - Schedules meetings
   - Keeps the project on track
   - Thinks about the ‘big picture’
   - Ensures meetings follow a time line/agenda
   - Takes notes at meetings to send to everyone afterwards

3. Editor(s)
   - Edits completed work
   - Compiles different pieces of reports/presentations from different group members to create ‘flow’ and consistency

4. Researcher(s)
   - Researches topics for the project
   - Presents information to the group
   - Provides the group members with sources and information

5. Writer(s)
   - Writes the project/report/presentation
   - Responsible to follow guideline so that editor(s) have time to review and compile information

6. Trouble-Shooter/Brainstormer
   - Thinks about positive/negatives of ideas presented by the group
   - Thinks about possible solutions to problems
   - Critiques project based on assignment expectations/rubric to ensure success

7. Presenter(s)
   - Works with group members to compile and create presentation
   - Presents
Divide Work into Chunks
Distributing work between members can make it less overwhelming. If you are collaborating with a group on a large project, it may be in your best interests to divide the entire assignment into smaller, more manageable tasks. Individual members of the group, or even sub-groups, can then be assigned to primary areas of responsibility. This also makes it easier to complete because group members can also work independently on their sections. Everyone who participates in a group has their own particular strengths and weaknesses. Have an honest conversation with other group members about what they believe they can contribute to the group and base individual roles on tasks and activities that each person feels confident they can fulfill.

Establish a Common Goal
Take the time at the start of your group project to define a common goal. Do not assume that everyone shares the same goal. Determine what each individual wants to get out of the group work/project. If the common goal is not clear, take some time to brainstorm ideas.

Outline Objectives
At the beginning of every meeting, take the time to outline what you hope to accomplish as a group. Outlining objectives can help clarify any confusion that might hinder progress. Also, before going your separate ways, reflect on what was covered in your session and make sure everyone knows what is expected of them for future meetings.

Create a Timeline
Creating a timeline for a project ensures that it is not left to the last minute. If your group plans to meet regularly, establish a timeline of events with specific dates and deadlines. Discuss what is required and who is expected to do what and when.

Listen Actively
Each group member actively listening helps to foster a productive environment. Group members should pay close attention to what others are saying, resist the urge to interrupt, and clarify their understanding by paraphrasing or summarizing other’s comments.
Create a Communication Plan
It is important to communicate effectively when working in groups. It can help to:

• understand each other's needs
• maintain good relationships
• share opinions and expertise
• minimize interpersonal conflicts
• keep everything going in the right direction

However you decide to organize your communication, it is important to set mutually agreed upon ground rules for contribution. For example, if you miss a meeting you could be expected to read and respond to notes taken at the meeting within 24 hours. Or, if you consistently miss meetings/fail to communicate/produce work, you may not be given credit for the project. That being said, life happens. Put yourself in the shoes of your group members. Try and understand where they are coming from and be inclusive as much as possible.

Exchange Contact Information
If you are planning to participate in regular group work, generate a list of everyone’s phone numbers and email addresses. Give every group member a copy of the list so that you all know how to contact each other.

Schedule Meetings
If you are looking for a place to meet, consider booking one of the many group use rooms available here at Red Deer College. Just logon to The Loop to book a room catered to your needs.

Group meetings do not always have to be done in person. They could use virtual technology such as Skype or chat applications. Sometimes projects can be organized mostly via email which makes it easy to share notes and research.

Resolve Things Quickly and Fairly
When making a decision for a group project, it is very important to involve everybody. It can enable you to:

• fully utilize the expertise and wisdom in the group
• arrive at a better solution
• get support from the group members

Conflict and disagreement should not be ignored in a group. It has to be resolved properly. Otherwise, it can:

• affect the group’s progress
• ruin the relationships among members
• create barriers to good solutions and creative ideas
Resources


