

## **GROUP WORK SKILLS**

### **Why does a professor assign group work?**

Many students view group work as a frustrating and pointless task. However, professors use group work as an invaluable teaching tool. Education research indicates that, regardless of subject matter, students working in groups learn more of what is taught and retain it longer. Group work has been proven to be one of the most effective teaching tools when compared with other instructional formats.

### **What are the benefits of group work?**

- Group work provides the student with many different opinions and ideas on a subject.
- Each student provides his/her own unique academic background.
- Group work can prepare students for project work in a professional environment.

### **Troubleshooting**

The most common problems of group work are: an absence of leadership and co-ordination, difficulty defining and assigning tasks, maintaining equal participation, scheduling meetings, and achieving group goals.

The purpose of this handout is to help the student avoid these problems and suggest ways to make group work a positive experience.

## **Three Steps to Successful Group Work**

### **Step One: Identifying the Objective of the Assignment**

#### **1) What are the instructor's expectations?**

Consider the amount the project is worth, how it is to be presented, the subject matter to be covered, and questions to satisfy.

#### **2) What are the goals of each group member?**

Some members will be satisfied with a "B"; others will not rest until they achieve an "A+". This information will help the group define its overall goals and keep group members satisfied.

Some members will prefer to present, others to research, and others to write. By learning their expectations within the project, the group can delegate tasks fairly.

#### **3) What tasks need to be completed?**

Break the project down into manageable tasks that will need to be completed in order to finish the assignment. For example: compiling research, creating a thesis, finding evidence, creating a handout, creating a PowerPoint presentation, etc.

#### 4) **How much research is required?**

Most group projects require some research and outside references.

Identify how much research is required and how long it will take to compile those resources.

A good presentation will review approximately ten different resources. Most professors know the amount they require, so it is best to consult them if unsure.

### **Step Two: Dealing with Group Dynamics**

#### 1) **Create a master list of names and contact information**

Include the best ways to contact each person. For example: some students can only be reached by cell phone, others prefer e-mail, and some their home phone.

The contact list should include the task assigned to each person so you know who is responsible for certain aspects of the project if you need to consult them quickly.

#### 2) **NOMINATE A GROUP LEADER**

The leader's responsibilities will include:

- a) Making sure the group's objectives are defined.
- b) Maintaining the group's orientation toward those goals.
- c) Actively soliciting ideas from each group member.
- d) Making sure the group stays on task during meetings.
- e) Monitoring group cohesiveness and member satisfaction.

The job of the leader is not to do all of the work, but to ensure that members of the group work together to get it done.

The leader should be careful not to use his/her position to impose his/her ideas on the group.

#### 3) **Negotiate roles and responsibilities.**

Ensure that each group member is comfortable/satisfied with their tasks because:

- a) Dissatisfaction could create resentment and cause conflict within the group.
- b) Satisfied group members will be more productive, creative and willing to participate.

#### 4) **Determine the frequency, length, purpose of each group meeting.**

It is important to set down these terms so that:

- a) Meetings accommodate all (or most) group members.
- b) Meetings stay on track and do not lose their focus.
- c) Meetings become non-negotiable among group members.

#### 5) **Deal with problems as they arise. If issues cannot be resolved internally, go directly to your teaching assistant or professor.**

Members who are not contributing equally to the group (or in some cases not at all) should be warned early that their lack of contribution will not be accepted by the group.

If the group is experiencing a creative block, it may be helpful to have the entire group meet with the professor to discuss the group's ideas and progress to that point.

## Step Three: Presenting a Group Project

**1) Ensure that your presentation is equally distributed.**

The professor has assigned group work in order to hear a variety of viewpoints.

**2) Practice makes perfect.**

Practice individually and then meet at least the day before in order to pinpoint any weaknesses in the presentation.

Some members may experience nervousness when presenting and may require more preparation and encouragement. This is a team effort, so help each other prepare.

**5) Have one person go to the classroom early and make sure any audio/visual aids are in appropriate working order.**

**6) Have one person ensure the handouts are prepared and distribute them to the class.**

**7) During the presentation.**

Introduce yourselves before the presentation begins and make sure to state your topic. Introduce each new speaker. For example: “Now Sarah will discuss the effects of industrialization on the British countryside.”

When another group member is speaking, appear interested and engaged.

Avoid making distracting movements or talking to other group members during the presentation.

Avoid interrupting a group member while he/she is presenting even if he/she have made an error.

**“Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company, a society work, a civilization work”**

**- Vince Lombardi**

### References

Davis, Barbara Gross. “Collaborative Learning: Group Work and Study Teams.” Tools For Teaching. <[www.teaching.berkeley.edu](http://www.teaching.berkeley.edu)>

<author unknown> “Fastfacts: Collaborative Group Work.” The Learning Commons. <[www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca](http://www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca)>

<author unknown> “Group Work and Collaborative Writing: Forming, Structure, Roles.” Group Work and Collaborative Writing. <[www-honors.ucdavis.edu](http://www-honors.ucdavis.edu)>

Adapted By: Holly Chester, Student Learning Assistant, Fall 2004.