

Building Strong Team Dynamics

Based on (and taken wholesale, in most cases) from:

<https://www.teaching.unsw.edu.au/group-work>

Help Students See the Value of Group Work

Discuss the advantages of working in groups:

- allows you to become an active participant in your learning
- can help you develop confidence in working with peers
- can produce a supportive working environment
- allows you to gain a deeper understanding of course content
- can encourage you to ask questions and challenge assumptions
- gives you an opportunity to experience a variety of roles
- can result in high quality group projects
- allows you to benefit from the diverse perspectives and expertise of your peers
- provides you with skills that are important in the workplace such as problem solving, negotiation and conflict resolution, leadership, communication and time management.

Questions

- How do you think you might use group skills in the workplace?
- How do you think working in groups in your particular field of study might differ from doing so in another context or discipline?

Make Your Expectations Clear

For in-class activities:

- Give clear guidance about the “deliverable.” Will students hand something in or present something? If so, what?
- Give a time limit. And then time it. Announce when time is getting low.
- Clarify roles within groups, such as recorder, facilitator, questioner, supporter, and reflector
- Describe how students will be assessed. Is the activity worth any points? What are the points based on? Are you assessing process or product or both?

Sample Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course you will be able to:

- articulate the factors that contribute to a successful group
- identify and establish group roles and responsibilities for a given project
- demonstrate project management skills such as the creation of timelines and action plans
- implement strategies for dealing with conflict within groups
- work effectively in a group to prepare a written report on a given topic
- develop strategies for working effectively in a multidisciplinary team
- demonstrate an understanding of the structure of meetings (e.g. agendas)
- provide constructive feedback to peers on their contribution to a group project
- demonstrate interpersonal and reflective listening skills

- reflect on the progress of your group skills and identify areas for improvement

Sample Expectations

- regular attendance at group meetings
- equity of contribution
- evidence of collaborative behavior
- appropriate time and task management
- application of creative problem solving
- use of a range of working methods
- an appropriate level of engagement with the task
- evidence of a capacity to listen
- responsiveness to feedback/criticism

Set Up Groups

Whether you decide to set up the groups yourself, or have students set up their own groups, it's important to help them understand how to do this well.

Short Reflection for Students as They Choose Groups

What am I like when I'm in a group?

Complete the following sentences:

- In groups I tend to...
- In groups I tend to avoid...
- I like groups where...
- I don't like groups where...
- In this group I would like to be...
- How I'd like this group to be for me...

Group Size

The size of your group may have been fixed by your tutor. If it has not been, keep the following things in mind as you decide how many members to include:

- Small groups tend to work faster and be easier to manage and coordinate. If the project is relatively small and of short duration, consider choosing a smaller group of 3 or 4.
- A small group may lack the full range of expertise or team skills, including the creativity to produce good ideas. It can be vulnerable if one member drops out, falls ill or doesn't pull their weight.
- Large groups (e.g. of 6–8) can generally cope with larger projects. For example, they can generate more ideas, get more work done, collect and analyze more data, do more background reading. They can also cover for missing or undermotivated members.
- Large groups can be very difficult to organize. It can be particularly difficult to pull the work of a large group together, e.g. a group report or presentation. Larger groups need more structure, more formal meetings and clearer roles for each individual.
- Groups of more than 8 require excellent project management skills and plenty of time to complete the task.

Deciding on Group Membership

Things to consider:

- Selecting group members isn't just about getting together with friends. In fact groups of friends can sometimes work poorly together on projects because they may not feel they can be tough enough with each other.
- Neither is it simply a matter of choosing the brightest or those who get high marks. Bright students might be incompatible and very poor at cooperating with each other.
- Effective groups contain a balanced range of types of group member whose different strengths complement each other. For example, it is no good having a group of creative people with no one who is good at project management.
- It can also be a disaster to have a group full of leaders with no workers.
- It is useful to consider your personal strengths and preferences so that you are clear on what you might bring to a group. This will help you to select group members so that you get a balanced pattern of strengths and preferences to help determine group members' roles and responsibilities.

Save Time for Reflection

Last time

- What I liked **most** about the group was...
- What I liked **least** about the group was...
- The **most** effective things about the way the groups worked were...
- The **least** effective things about the way the groups worked were...
- The things I did that helped the group **most** were...
- The things I did that helped the group **least** were...

Next time

- The types of people I'd like to work with are...
- The roles I'd like to play in the group are...
- The exercises I'd like the group to go through are...
- The working methods I'd like to use are...
- The way I'd like us to run our meeting is...