

"More hands make for lighter work."

"Two heads are better than one."

"The more the merrier."

Group work (or cooperative learning) is a highly effective and powerful way to learn. Research shows that students working in groups tend to learn more of what is taught, retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats, and are more satisfied with their classes (Davis, 1993; Barkley et al., 2005; Mello & Less, 2013; Freeman et al., 2014). In addition, group work builds classroom community and can lead to a more positive college experience (Svinicki 2016). Finally, when students work in groups, they are exposed to other perspectives and alternatives and "they share and exchange ideas," (Tang 1998). This is beneficial because students can recognize the complexity of what they are learning and be involved in the construction of knowledge.

Sharing ideas and knowledge to tackle complex and larger scale projects and problems, learning from and about other people and gaining different perspectives, having others reflect to you your strengths and weaknesses – all of this will help your studies. Further to that, you get a chance to develop the soft skills that are highly relevant and sought after to many workplaces all around the world such as time management, accountability, communication, leadership and problem-solving skills.

Benefits of Diverse Teams

Diverse teams have been proven to be better at problem-solving and decision-making for a number of reasons. First, they bring many different perspectives to the table. Second, they rely more on facts and use those facts to substantiate their positions. What is even more interesting is that, according to the Scientific American article "How Diversity Makes Us Smarter," simply "being around people who are different from us makes us more creative, diligent, and harder-working."

Group work is a fantastic opportunity for students to draw on the strengths and experience of their peers. However, often group work is a new experience for some students and can result in stressful situations. The following material is meant to give students some helpful advice in order to create a successful group.

Get organized

1. Assign roles. See examples of roles below.
2. Create a timeline. A timeline is important to make sure the project isn't left until the last minute.
3. Divide projects into chunks. Distribute work between members to make it less overwhelming. This also makes it easier to complete because group members can work

independently on their sections.

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

5. Create a communication plan. 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.

Group Roles

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 timeline/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 information to class