

Group work challenges	Description	Solution
Scheduling problems	This can create roadblocks to getting started/continuing with projects. It is frustrating for students who feel that others aren't compromising and don't take their situation into consideration	Try to be understanding of others' schedules and responsibilities which may be different from your own. Consider using virtual meeting spaces such as messenger chats, Zoom, and email to communicate. Take turns picking the venue and time of the meeting.
Group conflict	Group conflict is natural and often necessary for effective projects. Sometimes though, it escalates and makes it even more difficult to focus.	Don't let personal feelings impact your work in the group. Focus on the task. Try and find common ground between two ideas to reach reconciliation. Address conflicts directly and respectfully.
Uneven contribution	Some group members don't contribute to the group project or aren't perceived to be contributing to the group. This creates tension in the group and is unfair to group members.	Set up clear guidelines and work expectations at the beginning of the group project. Assign roles and responsibilities so that each person will be making an equal contribution. Speak directly, but respectfully to the person who is not completing their work.

Different expectations	Some members strive for perfection, while others simply want to pass. Some begin projects in advance, while others procrastinate. This can create tension because the group is not working towards the same goal.	Early communication is key to make sure everyone is focused on common goals. Keep goals realistic and understand that your actions affect others in the group. Make a timeline so that your group can stay on an agreed plan for getting the project done.
Getting stuck	At some point groups may get 'stuck' and hit a mental road block. This is discouraging and can lead to procrastination and avoidance.	Reread project expectations and goals. Have a brainstorming session where ideas are discussed. Create a mind map to link common ideas and trains of thought. Seek help from your professor if you remain stuck.
Groupthink	'Groupthink' occurs when members of a group agree with other group members in order to avoid conflict. This stifles creativity and constructive evaluation of alternative ideas.	Thinking critically about ideas presented, offering and assessing alternatives, and embracing diverse opinions from group members. Work through projects analytically using the groups' combined knowledge and experience.

Group work and discussion sample guidelines

- Share responsibility for including all voices in the conversation. If you tend to have a lot to say, make sure you leave sufficient space to hear from others. If you tend to stay quiet in group discussions, challenge yourself to contribute so others can learn from you.
- Listen respectfully. Don't interrupt, turn to technology, or engage in private conversations while others are speaking. Use attentive, courteous body language. Comments that you make (whether asking for clarification, sharing critiques, or expanding on a point) should reflect that you have paid attention to the previous speakers' comments.
- Be open to changing your perspectives based on what you learn from others. Try to explore new ideas and possibilities. Think critically about the factors that have shaped your perspectives. Seriously consider points-of-view that differ from your current thinking.

- Understand that we are bound to make mistakes in this space, as anyone does when approaching complex tasks or learning new skills. Strive to see your mistakes and others' as valuable elements of the learning process.
- Understand that your words have effects on others. Speak with care. If you learn that something you've said was experienced as disrespectful or marginalizing, listen carefully and try to understand that perspective. Learn how you can do better in the future.
- Take pair work or small group work seriously. Remember that your peers' learning is partly dependent upon your engagement.
- Understand that others will come to these discussions with different experiences from yours. Be careful about assumptions and generalizations you make based only on your own experience. Be open to hearing and learning from other perspectives.
- Make an effort to get to know other students. Introduce yourself to students sitting near you. Refer to classmates by name and make eye contact with other students.
- Understand that there are different approaches to solving problems. If you are uncertain about someone else's approach, ask a question to explore areas of uncertainty. Listen respectfully to how and why the approach could work.
- Differentiate between opinion—which everyone has—and informed knowledge, which comes from sustained experience, study, and practice. Hold your opinions lightly and with humility.
- Recognize how your own social positionality (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, ability) informs your perspectives and reactions to your instructor and those whose work you study in the course.
- Differentiate between safety and comfort. Accept discomfort as necessary for intellectual growth sometimes.
- Identify where your learning edge is and push it. For example, whenever you think, I already know this, ask yourself, How can I take this deeper? Or, How am I applying in practice what I already know?

Constructive and Destructive Group Work Behaviors

Constructive Group Behaviors

- Cooperating: Is interested in the views and perspectives of the other group members and is willing to adapt for the good of the group.
- Clarifying: Makes issues clear for the group by listening, summarizing and focusing discussions.
- Inspiring: Enlivens the group, encourages participation and progress.
- Harmonizing: Encourages group cohesion and collaboration. For example, uses humor as a relief after a particularly difficult discussion.
- Risk-Taking: Is willing to risk possible personal loss or embarrassment for the group or project success.
- Process Checking: Questions the group on process issues such as agenda, time frames, discussion topics, decision methods, use of information, etc.

Destructive Group Behaviors

- Dominating: Takes much of meeting time expressing self-views and opinions. Tries to take control by use of power, time, etc.
- Rushing: Encourages the group to move on before the task is complete. Gets "tired" of listening to others and working as a group.
- Withdrawing: Removes self from discussions or decision-making. Refuses to participate.
- Discounting: Disregards or minimizes group or individual ideas or suggestions. Severe discounting behavior includes insults, which are often in the form of jokes.
- Digressing: Rambles, tells stories, and takes the group away from the primary purpose.
- Blocking: Impedes group progress by obstructing all ideas and suggestions. "That will never work because..."

We all have tendencies toward both constructive and destructive behaviors. *Which one constructive and one destructive group work behavior do you feel best describes you?*

Adapted from Brunt (1993). Facilitation Skills for Quality Improvement. Quality Enhancement Strategies. Madison, WI

Self-reflection

What were the worst group work and best group work experiences you have had previously? What could have been implemented to prevent the worst scenarios? What characteristics were present in the best group work experiences that you would want to replicate in the future?

What are your most prominent constructive and destructive (as we all have both) behaviors in group work? Knowing your own prominent constructive and destructive behaviors, what goal will you make for yourself for your next group work assignment?