

TIPS FOR GROUP WORK

In many workplaces people work in teams so UTS frequently has group assessment activities to practice and develop teamwork skills. Although being successful at group work can take some practice, there are a number of tips and strategies that you can use with the aim of helping your groups to run smoothly.

Qualities of successful groups

If you think about successful groups you have been part of in the past, whether at UTS, in the workplace or in sport, you might notice that these shared the following common features: a) group members were committed to the group; b) there was a sense of mutual responsibility; c) a clear breakdown of roles and tasks; d) a timeline of due dates; and, importantly, e) clear and respectful communication between group members.

Strategies for all groups

If you have the opportunity to pick your group members, pick those with similar academic goals to you (i.e. desired grades), different strengths (to maximise the quality of the work) and similar schedules (so you can coordinate meeting times). However, more often than not, we are not able to choose our group members. The following practical strategies are helpful for *all* groups.

The first time you meet as a group, it might be a good idea to do the following:

- Swap names and contact details
- Allocate tasks and create a timeline of due dates – make sure all group members agree on the dates
- Appoint a group coordinator to monitor tasks and remind others when interim tasks are due on the timeline
- Agree on modes of communication e.g. face-to-face meetings, emails, UTS Online etc. Always follow up meetings with a communication summarising planned actions. Start work on the assessment or project as early as possible.

At each meeting, each group member might like to give a progress report. This is a chance for group members to report on what they have been working on since the last meeting and gives everyone a good sense of where you are up to as a group. If English is not your first language you might find it helpful to email your progress report ahead of time. Online tools that allow content to have a number of shared users (such as *Google Docs*, *Wikispaces* and *Wikidot*) are often useful so you can access and work from the same documents simultaneously.

Groups might contain a mix of personalities, cultures and ideas – and working effectively in a group requires us to be friendly and respectful, to listen to each other and ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute ideas and content.

It is important to be responsible for your own workload and keep up to date with your allocated tasks, arrive on time to meetings, and reply to communications from your group in a timely manner.

Troubleshooting

Sometimes despite our best intentions, we can run into difficulties in group work. Below are some common dilemmas and some strategies for working through them.

- *Unequal contributions.* If you believe one or more group members are not contributing to the group, speak to them in a respectful manner and refer back to the division of tasks and the timeline. If you are unable to resolve the matter as a group, it's a good idea to speak to your tutor.
- *Aiming for different grades.* If you are aiming for a HD and the other group members are not, ask yourself, *Am I prepared to do the extra work to deliver the high mark?* If you decide to do extra work, it might be a good idea to volunteer to do an early task (and do it to the highest possible quality) and then you might like to offer to assist the group in other tasks.

It's important to be adaptable in a group setting, to listen, contribute and collaborate with other people. Group work doesn't finish at UTS and you are learning skills that you will most likely be applying in any workplace setting.

If you are still finding group work challenging, chat to your tutor or come and speak to a UTS Counsellor.

Resources

UTS: Library

<http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/help/study-skills/group-work>

UTS: Institute for Interactive Media and Learning

<http://www.iml.uts.edu.au/learn-teach/groupwork/index.html>

Macquarie University

http://www.international.mq.edu.au/student-services/studysupport/online/group_working_well

University of Waterloo

<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/tips-students/being-part-team/teamwork-skills-being-effective-group-member>