

Working in groups

This is a brief guide to working in groups. It can help you to plan your group work to maximise efficiency and improve productivity.

The key stages in successful group management are listed along with some advice on giving feedback and supporting the work of others.

Discuss the contents of this guide with the members of your group. Decide which areas are relevant to your work and use the Key Stages to inform your activities.

Communication

When you are working with a group it is important that everyone is aware of how the work is proceeding. You should avoid working as a collection of individuals, work as a team.

To work successfully you should:

- **talk about your work - how is it coming along, what is going well, where are the problems?**
- **talk about yourself - how you are feeling about the work or the group?**
- **share your ideas**
- **offer support and feedback to others**

Communication within a group therefore:

- **avoids isolation**
- **encourages productivity**

It is important whenever you are involved in group activities to hold a series of meetings with the group as a whole. This allows you to plan as a group, to make joint decisions and to support each other's work. The first of these meetings should be held right at the beginning of your work together to carry out many of the essential planning stages that follow.

Benefits of group work

Groups...

- share ideas and experiences
- offer an alternative to working on your own
- draw on your particular strengths and experiences
- increase the quality of output
- find ways of solving problems
- provide a supportive environment for challenging work
- develop essential skills for use throughout your career

Key stages

- *Setting ground rules*
- *Defining objectives*
- *Establishing roles*
- *Delegating the tasks*
- *Agreeing deadlines*
- *Monitoring progress*
- *Completing a task*
- *Evaluating your performance*

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Key stages in group management

Setting the ground rules

Any team needs to be guided by a common set of rules that are shared amongst and understood by those involved. This ensures that each of you knows what will be expected of you and how work will be divided. For example:

This group will:

- draw on individual expertise
- encourage constructive debate
- provide a supportive environment for feedback
- share work equally
- agree and adhere to deadlines
- report back at weekly meetings
- avoid discriminatory language/behaviour

Discuss your group's ground rules in the light of the tasks that you have been set.

Make sure that each group member has a copy of these ground rules.

Identifying your objectives

These can be divided into deliverable objectives and personal objectives.

Deliverable objectives answer the following questions:

What does the group need to achieve?

What activity have you been set?

What is the brief?

What is the projected outcome?

Presentation?

Report?

What individual elements are involved?

How can the activity be divided into tasks?

Personal objectives answer these questions:

What skills can I learn from this activity?

What subject understanding can I gain?

How can I consolidate my learning?

Discuss **deliverable** and **personal** outcomes at a group meeting to develop an overview of the whole project.

Establishing roles

In planning your group activities you should try to share responsibilities according to individual strengths. This isn't to say that you should always be doing the same activity, indeed this should be avoided, but individual temperaments are often more suited to one task than they might be to another. For example:

- Who is a strong team leader?
- Who is most suited to organising group meetings?
- Who produces good ideas?
- Who is careful and meticulous?
- Who is energetic and decisive?

You will also need to consider your weaknesses:

- Who can be over critical?
- Who is indecisive?

Discuss your strengths and weaknesses as a group. Identify who might be able to add their expertise to each task and where you might need support.

Delegating the tasks

Each main activity that you have been set can be broken up into smaller sub-tasks. Divide these amongst the group according to your individual strengths, experiences and preferences.

Establish subgroups within a group to tackle tasks requiring substantial amounts of work.

Apply the same ground rules to your work here as you would in the main group as a whole.

Vary delegated task-group sizes so that each of you has a chance to work on your own and in a task group.

Remember, you may like to delegate tasks according to skill strengths.

Further information

This Study Advice Sheet has been produced by Student Services at UW.

We support student learning across the University through the publication of materials such as these.

Other study advice sheets that you may find useful include:

Essay writing

Learning at university

Learning journals

Making oral presentations

Minimising stress

Organising yourself

Reading efficiently

Revision and exam skills

Study at a distance

Taking notes

Using feedback to improve your work

What does the question mean?

Writing reports

All study advice sheets are available to view and download on the following website:

www.worcester.ac.uk/studyskills

or you can follow the links from your SOLE page.

You may also find it useful to check out the '**Moving On**' pack, accessible from the link on your SOLE page.

'**Moving On**' is a study skills package specifically designed to help you prepare for Higher Education & to become a successful student.

Contact: studyskills@worc.ac.uk

Giving feedback

When working in a group, you will have many opportunities to comment upon other people's work. There are several golden rules to follow if you are to help people improve by supplying constructive feedback.

- Be positive
- Remember that this may well be a developmental stage
Don't criticise something as if it were the final product
- Offer three main items of criticism
Any more disheartens
- Focus on the main issues
Don't focus on minor issues unless they are the only things that are wrong
- Remember that everyone has a different way of doing things
Be flexible and avoid focusing on how you would have done it
- Start and finish with something positive.
Be helpful, not harmful
- Always be aware of how something could be improved.
Don't simply criticise
- Ask for feedback on your comments
Were you helpful?
Did you say too much or too little?