

Is group work a thorn in your side? This video will equip you with the strategies you'll need to help your group be successful, leaving you anxiety-free about your next project.

But why have strangers collaborated on projects? Research shows that we actually learn better and retain more information when we work with diverse perspectives. No matter what career you choose, some form of group work will be necessary, so starting now is great practice.

So why are group projects sometimes a major headache, even though it has led to great things, like Destiny's Child and The Rolling Stones. Yet still, most students don't do group work but instead stitch the work of 4-5 different individuals together like it's Frankenstein's monster. The true purpose of group work is to use a range of perspectives to develop one polished and refined product.

Now, let's focus on the early stages of group work:

One of the biggest struggles students have with group work is managing the logistics of the project: who's taking notes during the meeting? Who organizes meetings? Who will check in to see if tasks are completed? Before delving into the answers, have everyone share some bad habits that they want to improve on, for example, a tendency to be late or dominate a conversation. Basing these responsibilities on your answers, will save you a lot of frustration down the road. We divided these responsibilities into roles like a notetaker and a mediator, you can learn more by clicking the link in the description. Decide what works best for you and your group and allow room for flexibility in your roles.

Up next is project planning:

Before you end, make sure your group is on the same page when it comes to your purpose, goals and approach for the project. Be specific with your tasks, instead of “shoot a video” break down the process into each of its steps. This will prevent potential conflicts and the group can always refer back to this page if you’ve hit a roadblock.

Make a chart with each task, the individual assigned to the task, its completion date, and necessary resources. Prioritize them based on time and importance but be realistic and flexible with your deadlines.

When assigning tasks and roles, assign them according to strengths but keep in mind that group work is a good opportunity to learn new skills. Aim for an equal number of hours when distributing tasks and remember that some tasks may require more than one person. Also, make sure to schedule several check-ins so you can ensure that everyone stays on track and are better equipped to deal with set-backs.

Another important part of group work is online collaboration:

Online tools can promote efficiency and organization. However, many students go wrong by using it as a replacement for in-person group interactions.

Think of a spectrum, with complete democracy on one end and complete individualization on the other. There are certain parts of a group project that work better when the whole group is involved and others where it might not be necessary. For example, big group decisions like ideating and check-ins should be done in person. Maybe a subgroup where a few people work together on a big

task and present back to the whole team is more appropriate. Items like deciding a font are probably better for online work.

Decide what's appropriate for each task but strive for in-person or video conferences as much as possible. Even though scheduling is a hassle, sometimes things that take 20 emails to figure out can easily occur in 10 minute conversations.

Here are some online tools we suggest for your own group work.

For File sharing use Dropbox, Onedrive or Google Drive

For Content creation use Google Docs,

For Communication use Slack,

For Video Conferencing use Skype, Google Hangouts

For Project management use Trello or Asana

For Scheduling use Doodle or Google Calendar

However, it is easy to forget that not everyone has Facebook or can use these platforms. Exchange phone numbers and emails the old fashioned way especially in cases of emergency.

If there's a gap in your group's communication, it's also it's also handy to know how to manage conflict:

Conflict, of some magnitude, is pretty much inevitable when you work with others. The way you handle it determines whether the different perspectives, personalities and interests work to the team's advantage or its demise. Some examples of conflict you might face include: a conflict of ideas, a lack of accountability, or missing deadlines.

To stay on the right track, here are some tips on how to manage conflicts that may arise:

- Stay calm, be patient and respectful, and have each person speak one at a time.

- To avoid personal attacks, address the action, not the person. Instead of “you always or you should” try “I feel or I’ve noticed”. If the issue gets personal, enlist the help of an objective party like a TA or your prof.

- All relationships require compromise so choose solutions that are in the group’s best interests.

Also, be sure to check out the links for specific strategies to help you with group process, managing conflict and communicating effectively.

In the end, what most people dislike about group work is the stress of managing it. By embracing the core idea of actually working in a group, you’ll have the opportunity to identify your own strengths and weaknesses and soon learn first-hand what great groups can achieve.

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