Student Guide to Group Work

Planning the Project – Video Transcript

With a better understanding of your team, and how to communicate with them, it's now time to plan the project. You might be the type of person who likes to make it up as they go along, but when it comes to group work, planning is essential.

Planning the project is important because it helps you stay on track and establishes the processes you will follow. Your professor isn't just concerned about the finished product; they want you to learn from the process. If you've planned properly with your team, then you will have a successful process, and a superior finished product.

First, your group needs to work together to review the assignment or project your professor has given you. What is the purpose of the assignment and what is it asking you to do? What criteria will you be marked on? Remember your professors and TAs are available as resources if anything is unclear in the assignment. They often have office hours, where you can ask questions about the assignment, or seek guidance throughout the planning process.

Next you need to identify the main tasks your group needs to accomplish to complete the project. Your assignment instructions often provide information about key tasks and other guidelines. You will need to identify roles and talk about who will do what task. Sometimes a role may be carried out by an individual or sometimes it'll need more than one person but planning in advance helps ensure accountability. Examples of roles include facilitator, note taker, time keeper, devil's advocate, and more. When working out roles, it's a good idea to be mindful of each member's preferences and comfort levels, discussed in Understanding the Team. Your group should also build in flexibility around rules to manage absences or unexpected hiccups.

It's really important for your group to record the key tasks, deadlines, and rules you agreed to do, so that everyone can refer to them, and keep group members accountable. This could take the form of a to-do list or group charter, that keeps you on track. Remember to build in some flexibility, as some things may shift as you move along; this makes regular check-ins especially important to track your progress as a group.

York University offers many tools and technologies to help you engage in planning effectively, and the web offers free calendaring and planning tools for teams as well. Remember that you're going to need to engage in tasks that require, not just subject knowledge, but also academic skills, like research and writing. In particular, it is critical that your group practice academic integrity, by tracking and documenting the sources you use from the outset, such as journal articles, websites, books etc., and by following assignment guidelines on which parts of the work need to be carried out individually and which ones collaboratively.

All this work has a payoff! By pulling together to plan your project, you'll both receive amazing results, and acquire the skills to collaborate for success!