

Student Guide to Group Work

Understanding the Team – Video Transcript

With group work, it can be tempting to just jump in to doing tasks without spending time on getting to know each other and figuring out how your group is going to work well together. The key is understanding the team. This means that each group member must be open and honest with each other about their expectations, strengths, weaknesses, goals etc. This is more than just a couple of icebreakers. It is about building a foundation for all the work and stages that follow. Remember your professor may assign you to your group but you all create the team!

To do this, you all need to understand what you each bring and want to get from the group project. This process starts with self-reflection. Some questions you can ask yourself include: What are my goals for this assignment? What kinds of time/work/family constraints will affect my availability? How do I like to communicate? Face-to-face? In writing? Am I eager to engage or do I prefer to observe? The next step is for everyone to share their information. This is because sharing personal goals will help the group to "form" itself into a team, as members begin to understand each other and negotiate through differences to set common goals that the group as a whole can agree on. Sharing strengths and weaknesses will also help with negotiating roles.

Sharing everyone's preferred contact methods, availability and ways to communicate will help the team develop an effective communication plan for online and in-person. In the beginning, it might not be smooth sailing. Some personality differences or different work habits could seem problematic, which could lead to disagreement. Be mindful that you may come to the group with certain assumptions and preconceptions. Being self-aware is a first step for cultivating a respectful and inclusive environment for your group to work in. Try to be sensitive to how your teammates receive what you say or do to ensure that the atmosphere remains positive and productive. This is a completely normal and inevitable part of team formation. It is even called "storming."

With a bit of intentional work, your group can form important connections to establish a sense of community as it resolves issues and learns to work together as a team. Once you have had the chance to get to know each other better, you can begin to decide how you can best work together. One way to do that is to form a group charter that articulates the "rules" or "guidelines" the team will live by, so that all team members feel included and accountable to each other. These "norms" help the team develop a healthy group dynamic. Some of the best ideas are generated from coming at a project with diverse backgrounds and views. Be prepared to listen to others, and to consider each other's perspectives.

By understanding each other, creating a group charter, and recognizing the value of listening, your team will form strong bonds, overcome obstacles and achieve better, more creative results.