Groupwork & Study Groups

What is groupwork?

Groupwork assessments are a common form of assessment at university, requiring students to work together to complete a shared project or task. Often, groups are assigned by the lecturer, providing an opportunity to develop teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and project management skills. While working with people you do not know well can be challenging, it reflects the collaborative nature of many professional environments and helps prepare you for the workplace.

Effective groupwork in 6 points

1. Establish a shared goal

Agree on what the group wants to achieve and the standard of work expected. A shared goal helps members stay focused and work towards the same outcome.

2. Agree on expectations early

Discuss attendance, communication, participation, deadlines, and workload at your first meeting. Recording expectations in a group agreement can help prevent misunderstandings and conflict.

3. Contribute fairly

Effective groupwork relies on everyone contributing. Complete your agreed tasks on time, participate actively, and communicate early if you encounter difficulties.

4. Communicate respectfully

Focus discussions on ideas and tasks rather than personalities. Listen to others, communicate professionally, and acknowledge different viewpoints.

5. Value diversity

Group members bring different experiences, perspectives, and strengths. Drawing on these differences can improve the quality of the group's work and create opportunities for learning.

6. Address problems early

Concerns about communication, workload, or participation are often easier to resolve when they are addressed promptly. If problems cannot be resolved within the group, seek support from your lecturer or tutor.

Recognise contributions

A positive group culture encourages participation and motivation. Acknowledge the efforts of group members, provide constructive feedback, and celebrate milestones as the project progresses.

When things go wrong

Disagreements and unequal contributions can occur in any group. Try to resolve issues collaboratively and professionally by focusing on solutions rather than blame. If the problem continues, contact your lecturer or tutor for advice and support.

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Study groups

Research shows that students who study together generally do better at university. A study group is an informal support network that provides opportunities to:

- discuss content and key concepts from weekly classes and course readings
- analyse assessment tasks and develop effective database search terms
- share information about useful resources
- manage stress and stay motivated
- build friendships and a sense of belonging.

Study groups are usually *long-term*, often lasting for a semester or longer. It is a good idea to form a study group early in the semester and continue meeting if you find it beneficial.

Forming a study group

Look for people in your course who share similar goals, interests, and study habits. Simply ask whether they would be interested in forming a study group with you.

Where to meet

- *In person:* Bookable library study rooms, other campus spaces, or a mutually convenient location.
- *Online:* Microsoft Teams or another online platform agreed upon by the group.

When to meet

Your group can choose a meeting time that suits everyone, but a regular weekly meeting is recommended. Meeting consistently helps maintain momentum, deepen understanding of course content, and provide ongoing support. Allow enough time for members to discuss ideas, ask questions, and collaborate on study goals and assessment tasks.

The risks of collusion in study groups

Discussing assessments, course materials, and ideas with classmates is a valuable part of university study. However, developing and writing your assessment responses is your responsibility alone.

If a classmate is struggling with an assessment task, it is appropriate to discuss the task and share general advice. However, you should not share your draft, completed assessment, or detailed notes, as this may place both students at risk of collusion. Collusion is a form of academic misconduct that can result in penalties, including a reduced grade, or failure of the assessment task.

Studying together for exams is also a valuable learning strategy. Focus on discussing concepts, testing each other's understanding, and completing practice questions, rather than sharing notes or model answers. To avoid the risk of collusion, students should develop their own notes, drafts, and assessment responses independently.

Related helpsheets

- Groupwork Strategies Checklist
- Groupwork Presentations
- Time Management

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