

Group Project Tips for College Students

Successful Small Group Communication Strategies

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Group projects can be one of the most stressful and difficult assignments in college, especially if the whole group gets the same grade. Here are some group project tips.

Learning to work successfully in groups is an important skill people need in the workplace, so a group project in a college class can provide students with useful lessons.

Unfortunately, one of the lessons that students learn is that working in groups can be very difficult! Here are some basic tips to help you improve small group communication and create a successful group project.

Get Organized Immediately

Have a quick meeting with your whole group right away. Exchange contact information. Then pinpoint exact times when everyone is able to get together for meetings, and where those meetings should be. It might not be necessary to have lots of meetings, but you should get together at least once to make sure everything is in order.

In addition, it's important to organize your tasks immediately. First, unless the group has been assigned a specific topic or task, the group needs to reach a consensus about the topic. Second, group members need to be assigned specific tasks. Each group member should be asked to accomplish a specific task before the next group meeting.

Clarify the Assignment

Take the time to make sure you understand the assignment, and be sure to ask the professor if you have any questions. In addition, it's a good idea to run your group's ideas by the professor and make sure this idea is appropriate for the assignment.

Everyone is busy, so group meetings need to be as time effective as possible. First, avoid the urge to chat and socialize. Yes, it's great if group members get along, but it's also important to stay on task.

In order to use time effectively, it's also important to come to group meetings prepared. If only half the group completes the tasks that were to be completed for the meeting, this will waste time for everyone.

A helpful strategy for keeping group project meetings organized is to write a schedule of what needs to happen at the meeting. Your schedule might look something like this:

1. Ashley and Tom: Discuss the important main points that you found in the research.
2. Group: Discuss how to incorporate these points into the presentation.
3. Carlos and Sara: Show the group your rough drafts of the charts and graphs.
4. Group: Evaluate the charts and graphs and decide what changes Carlos and Sara need to make.

5. Group: Write a rough draft of the group presentation and decide who will present each piece of information.
6. Group: Delegate tasks to be completed before the next meeting.

Speak Up

A group project is not the place to be shy. For one thing, group success depends on a free and broad exchange of ideas, so everyone needs to contribute. In addition, it's important to speak up about problems you may be having with other group members. If someone is not doing his or her fair share of the work, this person needs to be confronted.

Avoid Groupthink

Groupthink is when the group reaches a consensus about something and everyone agrees without question – even if that idea is not actually the best one for the group. Sometimes group members are so eager to achieve consensus that they fail to explore other possibilities.

Groups can reduce or avoid groupthink by devoting some time to brainstorming, and by thoroughly discussing the pros and cons of proposed ideas. As a group member, don't be afraid to disagree, as sometimes consensus can actually hurt the group.

Group Workload Balance

One of the most frustrating parts of group work is that some people don't do their fair share of the work. To some degree, there's only so much you can do about this, other than to make sure you get your own work done. If someone isn't doing enough work, the first thing to do is to point this out to this person gently. You may want to get other group members to "back you up." If the problem persists, voice your frustrations more emphatically. Avoid getting the instructor involved if at all possible, but if all else fails, report the problem to the "authority."

Mastering the Group Project Experience

Working in groups can be a nightmare, but it's a skill you truly need to know. Make an effort to get organized and to voice your ideas and concerns, and you're on your way to a successful group project.