

Skills for Group Projects

YOU'VE JUST RECEIVED THE SYLLABUS FOR YOUR ENGLISH

CLASS. The teacher smiles as she tells you about the extensive group work you will be using in the class. You groan inside as you consider dropping the course. Group work seems to be more loved by teachers than students. However, learning to work effectively as part of a group is a wonderful skill you will use frequently in your career. So, how do you make group projects effective, educational, and even enjoyable?

Remember: Do not assume your group experience will be bad. Beginning a group project with a positive attitude will have a favorable impact on those around you. You should not compare this experience to those in the past. This is a fresh start.



GETTING STARTED

1. **Get to know one another.** At your first meeting, find out each member's major, job, and interests. This will help you be sympathetic to the people in your group and acquaint you with the stresses they have in their lives. Getting to know one another is also an excellent way to get an idea of the talents and skills that will strengthen your group. Find out who types fast, who knows somebody that can be interviewed, who is best at logically thinking through an argument and other similar questions. This knowledge will also be beneficial when dividing tasks. Make sure to exchange phone numbers and set a schedule when everyone can meet.
2. **Create a time line.** At your first meeting, make a list of everything that needs to be done in order to complete the project. Then organize the list according to priorities and set deadlines for each portion of the project. Your time line will serve two purposes: First, you will be organized. Everyone in the group will know what is due when. The second advantage is that the project won't seem so huge when it is all broken down into parts. It will seem like a series of short assignments, instead of one large one.
3. **Make task assignments.** Talk with the group about how to divide the work equally so that everyone is consistently involved over the course of the project. Be the first one to volunteer for an assignment. This will ensure that you get to work on the portion of the project you are best at or most enjoy. When other members of the group see your willingness to volunteer, they may be more likely to volunteer for an assignment as well. Make sure the tasks are equal! Don't let yourself and one other motivated person in the group do all of the work.

WORKING ON THE PROJECT

1. **Do your part!** It may not be necessary for your entire group to meet together again, but make sure you attend every meeting for your smaller group. If you cannot attend a meeting, send along any assignment you were to complete with another member so the group does not get behind. Remember, any meeting you do not attend means that you will not have input into that portion of the project.
2. **Use effective communication skills.** One of the more important things to remember when working in a group is to be sensitive to other members' ideas, thoughts and opinions. Part of learning to work in a group is respecting others. There will be times when the work is being done differently than you think it should. That is okay. There are times members will disagree with you, but you will want them to respect your opinion. Group members' difference will make the project interesting, unique and insightful.
3. **Uncooperative members.** In nearly every group, there is usually one person who may not cooperate. Do not let this person's attitude affect your attitude or progress as a group. Carefully evaluate if your criticism of a member is merely a personality conflict or is there a specific problem. If other group members have similar reactions, then perhaps it is best to see the instructor about the problem. This is particularly true if the person is having a negative impact on completing the group project in a timely manner.



THE FINISHED PROJECT

1. **Get the assignment done a day or two in advance.** This will help your group make sure everything is in order. If you have kept to a schedule, you should not have to leave anything to the last minute. At least part of the group should do one final editing to ensure the project is presented the way the group had planned. There should be no surprises for anyone in the group about the final project.
2. **Routinely evaluate group performances.** If the group will work together throughout the class or semester, it is important to discuss grades with the group each time you are graded or evaluated. This will give you an opportunity to clarify your roles, express problems the group is having, and make changes to improve performance. It will also give you a chance to share positive feedback and successes.
3. **Fairly evaluate individual and group effectiveness.** The finished product may only be a portion of the grade for your project. Your professor may also ask you to evaluate groups and individual performance. Be fair in your assessment. Focus on how well you and other members completed tasks. Do not evaluate someone poorly because you may have disagreed with them or because they do things differently than you. Be honest with yourself in assessing your performance. If you feel that your final project grade is unfair, make an appointment to see the professor. Most professors are willing to listen to concerns about group projects. Explain carefully to your professor exactly why you think the grade is unfair and ask for him/her to reconsider.