

How to Survive... Working in groups

Group work

Whether you are allocated a group or form a study group with your friends, a key to good group work is remembering that everyone is different. **If managed well**, the group's mix of knowledge, personalities and talents can make for very successful team work.

Tips for effective group work

At the first group meeting it is important to set the group's goals and objectives.

It is also useful for each group member to commit to certain things. These include to

- do the pre-reading and other preparation required
- respect what each person has to say
- be prepared to put forward differing points of view
- criticise ideas not people
- start and finish on time
- have a regular meeting time and place
- ensure that everyone is informed of any change of plans.

It is a good idea to decide on the topic to be discussed for the following meeting at the previous meeting. This enables people to do the appropriate preparation.

Individual commitment to the group is a key factor in making groups work.

A good size for effective group work is 4-6 members.



Study groups– a way to proceed

On a rotational basis, appoint

- a facilitator whose task is to keep the discussion on track and ensure that everyone contributes. This is particularly important if English is not everyone's first language.
- a note taker who types up notes for distribution to the group
- a timekeeper

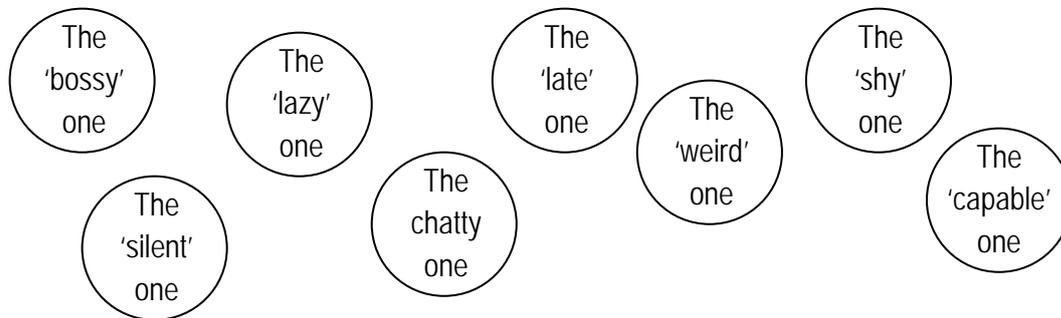
Try this procedure

- Begin with a different person each week explaining his/her understanding of the concept/topic/question at the beginning of each session.
- Follow with open discussion.
- Conclude with one or two individuals summarising the discussion and the facilitator checking that each person in the group knows what he/she has to do for the next meeting.

Each group is different so be prepared to make changes to suit the needs and goals of the group.

Appreciating group dynamics and differences

Each group will have a mix of 'types'. In addition, each member will have preferences for what they want to do.



Group challenges

Working in groups presents many challenges. These include

- finding out what each person's strengths are
- making the most of those strengths while giving each person the opportunity to try out and develop new skills
- dealing with those who are not pulling their weight.

Using each other's strengths—an inspirational story

A group of psych students were making reasonable progress with their assignment. However, one person in the team was often late for meetings and contributed very jumbled bits of writing that weren't much use. The other team members were getting more and more annoyed but no one wanted to say anything.

In the end they decided to ask him which part of the assignment he **wanted** to do. It turned out he'd never been very good at writing but he'd be happy doing all of the statistics for the group (which no one else wanted to do anyway).

The group didn't let their project grind to a halt because of one person. They found out what **everyone's** strengths were and **used** them to the benefit of the group assignment.

Other useful resources

STUDY *Smarter* Survival Guides: How to survive ... Lab reports and science writing, Making the most of tutes, Speaking to an audience, Time and task management

Using STUDY *Smarter* Resources

This resource was developed by the STUDY *Smarter* team for UWA students. When using our resources, please retain them in their original form with both the STUDY *Smarter* heading and the UWA crest.



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LS.005.2012 CRICOS Provider Code: 00126G



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