

STUDY @ HOME

SUCCESSFUL GROUP WORK IN REMOTE CLASS SETTINGS



Just like face-to-face groups, remote work groups function best when all members feel valued, motivated and invested in the success of the group. To help this process, groups need to establish and sustain group harmony while accomplishing the group task. Below are tips and guidelines to help ensure your group works successfully.

FIRST MEETING: SET GOALS AND ESTABLISH WAYS OF WORKING

Spend a bit of time getting to know each other. Make a brief time for each person to talk and share ideas: usually, the better you bond as a group, the more successful the outcome. Sharing could include what strengths people bring to the project, a positive past group experience, or their interest in the current project.

Early on, discuss and agree on the following:

- What meeting platform to use—in this, consider everyone's home situation and internet access.
- When to meet—set up a regular meeting schedule; virtual meetings are tiring, so keep meeting duration reasonable (2 hours max.) to ensure positive engagement.
- How to maintain contact between meetings—use online tools all group members can access.
- How to share files and collaborate on documents for the group project: ask your professor's advice about a good platform to use.
- How you'll make decisions at meetings (by consensus, majority rules, assume that silence = agreement, only those present, etc.)
- What to do if someone can't keep a commitment.
- How to address other issues that may occur (i.e. people not showing up at meetings, not having their work done, etc.)

Discussing all of these points in advance will clarify expectations and enable the group to address issues as they arise by having a plan in place.

MEETING ETIQUETTE

Meeting time is precious; make it count!

- Begin with a bit of social chat, perhaps by way of a check-in for each person.
- Have an agenda of what to accomplish in the meeting and share it beforehand.
- Assign a timekeeper to keep the discussion on track so as to move through essential points.
- Make sure everyone is invited to contribute their ideas.
- Be patient about disruptions/distractions during meetings—not everyone has an ideal home situation or a private space in which to work.
- Be prepared for each meeting, having done the tasks required.
- Make time for every person in the group to talk and share. Avoid getting frustrated with people who disagree—give them time to explain their reservations about a point.
- Before ending the meeting, set up a plan of action to prepare for the next one—what needs to happen before then? Who is doing what?

DIVIDING UP OR DISTRIBUTING TASKS

- Find out what people consider their strengths—what did they do that went well in a previous project? Facilitating, researching, organizing, writing, presenting, editing and technical skills are all necessary to a successful project; so are skills in maintaining group harmony and encouraging group members' engagement. Let people play to their strengths but also share responsibility for more mundane tasks.
- Do you need a leader? Not necessarily—the best groups share leadership: members naturally take the lead in various stages or different aspects of the project, according to their strengths.
- Be careful of anyone who views leadership as insisting that others accept their ideas. The project will not be as successful if one person dominates the decision-making, no matter how well they seem to know the subject.
- As a group, ideally start with brainstorming ideas and directions to take.
- Don't choose a direction too quickly—brainstorming is messy because it opens up many possibilities, but leads to better projects than trying to force a direction quickly by agreeing to something before fully thinking it through.

COMMUNICATING AS A GROUP

- Respect group members' ways of working—extroverts will be quick to share ideas; introverts will be more comfortable processing ideas in silence before committing to something, so allow some time for this during meetings.
- Have a system to ensure that people are not talked over, rushed or ignored.
- Virtual communication can be misinterpreted when not supplemented with the usual visual cues and body language of a face-to-face discussion, so check in to be sure that you are accurately understanding the other person's message whenever you are not sure.
- Be careful not to alienate another group member with sarcastic, reactive or marginalizing comments.



TROUBLESHOOTING PROBLEMS

- Groups can run into problems of direction, uneven participation or personality conflict.
- If you agree on ways of working early on (first meeting), you should experience fewer problems. If difficulties surface, make an effort to discuss and resolve issues rather than leaving them to get worse.
- When resolving problems, stick to whole group meetings rather than splitting into factions or “cliques” or by ganging up on one group member.
- Keep the goal of the project in mind as you work to resolve issues.
- Be solution focused—how can the group move forward?
- Involve the professor as a mediator only as a last resort.

For additional help with group projects, make a virtual appointment to see a **Learning Specialist** at the **Student Success Centre**. To book, call the receptionist at 514-848-2424 ext. **3921**.

If you need help understanding Concordia’s rules and regulations concerning academic integrity, or if you need assistance with any questions or difficult situations, contact the Student Advocacy Office at 514-848-2424, ext. **3992** or at studentadvocates@concordia.ca. They’re there to help.