

GROUP WORK: HOW TO SURVIVE

Study Skills – Group Work

It is undeniable that at least once per semester you have to work in a group, and while there are people who love working with friends and other people, coordinating with group members can be a complete nightmare. We are going to give you a few tips for handling group work and survive it!

According to organizational communication specialist Dr. Amy Way from Villanova University, we need to be first open about the idea and take the most of it and learn from the others.

Be open-minded

Having a negative attitude from the beginning may affect the outcome of the project and clutter the whole process. If you're open-minded when you approach a group project, you can set a more positive tone for the experience, which can create a more cohesive working environment.

If you go in assuming that one person will be the slacker of the group (based on previous interactions or first impressions), you probably won't give them many tasks or responsibilities. Those people might then realize you don't trust them or their ideas, and they may not put as much effort into their parts.

During your first group meeting, try to get to know one another instead of determining who will be the leader or the lazy member of the group. By being open-minded and getting to know your group members, you can create a positive and relaxed environment. If you're willing to get to know others, your group members will be more receptive to you and your ideas. Instead of dreading working together, you might actually enjoy it!

Make sure everyone understands the project

During the first meeting make sure everyone gives their opinion on what they understood from the assignment, so you can clarify any misunderstandings or confusion.

Assigning clear roles based on members' strengths will boost not only your organization but also their commitment to the project; there may be some disagreement or unwillingness at the beginning but friendly conversations will solve the situation.

However, if someone is being difficult or is not trying to work with the rest of the group, don't be afraid to say something. Remind everyone in the group that this is a collective effort and the work everyone puts in will reflect on all of your final grades.

Get organized

Getting organized is the key to a successful process. Groups work better when there are clear dates and updates to keep track of task development. You should also establish a regular meeting time that works for everyone and figure out a way to keep yourselves organized with deadlines.

Reserve a classroom at CRAI (Universidad del Rosario students (library)) or any other space you find comfortable and convenient for everyone; so you don't waste group time finding a place to work. Consider making a [Google calendar](#) that everyone can access so you're all aware of the upcoming deadlines.

Another good tool to use is [Google Drive](#). You can set up Word documents, spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations that all group members can access and work on. It eliminates sending a thousand emails back and forth with edits, which may lead to mistakes and missing parts. All members can work individually on their parts while seeing what other group members have added. It allows everyone to keep your project cohesive as it progresses.

Set clear and measurable goals

"Setting clear and measurable guidelines and expectations is key from the start," Way says. "So don't assume you're all on the same page about what it means to do a task—set clear goals."

Discuss things like resources, number of pages the project should be and due dates to proofread and connect all the parts. It is a good idea to have different checks during the process so you ensure the project is going in the correct path and no major changes are needed at the end.

Split up responsibilities and work together

Once you have organized the outline, it is important to assign roles, some people may be in charge of the research, others visual aids. Dividing the work does not necessarily

mean you need to work alone; if you have a great idea share it with other members of the group to construct a better idea together.

Remember as a group assignment everyone should know about every part of the project and comment on the possible adjustments and changes. Be flexible and diligent to complete dates and work with the group.

Encourage instead of criticize

When providing feedback to other people's work, make sure your comments are encouraging and positive; many people don't take criticism pretty well and this can trigger a delay in the process. Guide people to do a better search or improve diagrams on visual aids.

Use positive reinforcement, encouragement can go farther than criticism. "Group members should quickly identify what [they] are good at and make an effort to assign them those types of tasks," Way suggests. "Then, tell them when they do a good job and how it's been useful to the group."

Communicate, communicate, communicate

Make sure you have everyone's contact information, Cell phone numbers, emails, Facebook names, etc., just in case. It is very useful when you need to contact someone you don't normally see a lot.

Create a WhatsApp group to have instant communication when something important has come up, last minute change or imperative decision must be taken to involve everyone and provide equal opportunities to participate.