

EFFECTIVE GROUPWORK



Think of your experiences within a team. What were the benefits of being in that team? What were the drawbacks? Can you add to the table below?

Benefits	Drawbacks
Group members can utilise the knowledge of each other to achieve the goal and support each other.	There may be unequal participation from group members.
Different viewpoints and perspectives may arise within discussion.	Different viewpoints may cause conflict.
Workload is shared.	There maybe an unbalance of power or domination by members.
Groupwork adds something social to the task of learning.	In an asynchronous environment everyone is working at different times, this could lead to delays and slow response times.
There is an opportunity to be mentored in skills you have not practised by groupmembers who have those skills.	Can you think of any?
A good group builds on each others skills – not just in the content related skills but in the soft skills such as communication, decision making, problem solving, critical thinking, negotiation and teamwork.	Can you think of any?

So your assessment task requires you to be in a group. Before you even start discussing the task, the project brief, the assessment rubric, take the time to set the group up correctly so that it is successful in the weeks ahead.

With your group, work through the following sections to build the team/group. There is no one correct answer, it is how the team decides to work together that will lead to success.



ESTABLISH TRUST AND CONNECTION

Have a meeting to get to know each other. Start to call yourself a team, as it mirrors industry and adds a flavour of professionalism. When you meet, cover things that are linked to the assessment, but also outside of the assessment. A good team knows and trusts each other. Use the table on the next page as discussion points to connect to the group members. You don't have to cover all the points. Just use it as a springboard to build the connections between you.

Remember you also don't have to be group/study focussed on building the team. We are all humans first, students second.

Location you live in	First pet/current pet/dream pet	Skills you have to offer the team	What you would do if you won lotto	Skills you want to build on
Choice of how to spend the weekend	Worries you have with this project	Things that can distract you from your work	Hobbies, past times, things that keep you busy	Something that makes you happy
Food you would bring to a meeting if it was not virtual	Passions / Turn offs (within this task)	Movies that you have watched more than 5 times	What you would cook if the group came around for dinner	Something that is exciting about this project

AGREE THE WAYS OF WORKING

A good team knows each other's strengths, and weaknesses. They know each person's role and their responsibilities in the project. They also know how the group will operate in the timeframe of the project. Everyone should take on either a role they feel comfortable with or a role they would like to try as a way of expanding their skills. Whether the assessment instructions say to have a team leader or not, there needs to be someone to take responsibility for the oversight and the timekeeping of the group. Finally this knowledge is not stored in someone's head, it becomes the Agreed ways of working document. It is in a location that everyone can access and refer to it.

Hold your first team meeting and use the following discussion points as a way to set the group up.

Communication	What is effective communication to you? What are the group's communication lines? What are the communication tools? Does everyone have access to the tools and can use them? When are the best times to contact each other? What times are an absolute no-go time? What are the group Dos and Don'ts in the group's communication?
Outcomes	Where will outcomes be stored? Does everyone have access to this folder? How will things be added to the shared storage? Who has the responsibility to check that the shared place is being added to the timeframes set? What are the naming conventions for files (drafts, versions, member's initials, dates)? How will version control of the documents/source code be managed?
Roles and responsibilities	What are the roles required for the project? What happens if there are more roles than group members? Who wants to do a specific role? Who doesn't want to do a specific role? Is there a way to share the roles so each person gets to try different roles? What happens when someone doesn't do their role?
Commitment	What are the time commitments each group member has each week? What happens if you are falling behind in your commitment – who should you talk to? How can you support each other if something comes up where a group member falls behind? What happens if you find that the role or task you have committed to is bigger than the group thought? What happens if you just don't want to do this any more or stop studying?
Discussions and meetings	How will meetings run? Who will chair the meeting, and who will take minutes? We recommend recording the meetings, so what are the rules for videos being turned off? Where will the recording be stored? How is this task shared among group members? How often are meetings and how long? Where are minutes stored? What will be the agenda to the meetings? What happens if there is a strong discussion during the meeting due to differences? What happens if there is conflict in the meetings? How are action points from meetings decided and distributed to group members?
Reflection time	How will this be built into the task to ensure that the task is on track and proceeding well? How will this be built into the project plan to ensure that the group reflects on how the group is going and if any improvements need to be made?
Peer feedback	How will you be constructive in your feedback regarding tasks done by others? If the aim of feedback is to help your peer grow and develop, how will you ensure your feedback is: useful, adequate, fair and timely?

RECOMMENDATIONS and MUST DOs

If your tutor has not already set an MS Teams up for the intake, create MS Teams (select the team type Other) for your group. It comes free as part of Office 365 with your school account. Most people understand how to use it, but if not Microsoft have a great support section and videos. It has everything you need – a communication channel, file storage areas, a place to meet and it will record and save your meetings. Add your tutor to this team so they have some oversight and can provide guidance.

Meet more often at the start – short sharp meetings to get the focus, build the connections and keep momentum going. You can drop off how often once the team is up and running. Keep your meetings to be time efficient.

HINT: Remember to **KISS**  **your meetings** i.e. **Keep It Short and Simple**

Have the hard conversations from the start – honestly – don't just assume that things won't arise and everything will be a-ok. What will happen if someone slacks off or gets too busy with other things? What happens if you want to take on some challenges, but are given the boring stuff? What happens if all of the team gets busy and doesn't achieve things? And more importantly, what happens if someone stops being involved and communicating? Make decisions around these questions that are right for the group and document them. Upload the Agreed ways of working document into the group files.

Ensure all are comfortable and ok with the group decisions. Be flexible with decisions. You can't all be "president", and do the tasks you all want to do; someone has to do the coffee run and clean the meeting room after you all leave. The trick is to share roles, and balance out tasks you all would like to try.

Go for a structure that suits your group. You may like the traditional meeting/minutes/chairperson structure, or you may feel someone could work as a coordinator and people contact when and as needed. Whatever your approach, make sure all know the structure, are happy with the way of working and it is documented in the MS Team that this is the decision. Then review it to see if it's working or not.

Remember that your contribution to the team may also be assessed as well as the product/outcome of the project. Use the reflection sheet in the resources below or whatever has been supplied within your programme.

GOING FORTH

Once you have set up the group, built a connection and outlined how you will work together, it's task time. Utilise your tutor's direction and the assessment brief to plan out the project. Employ a project management tool (consider Trello or MS Planner).

Use this video [LINK](#) to guide you on this or search around YouTube for things.

In all cases, your tutor is there to oversee the group. Consider them the CEO who has delegated the project to this team to complete. So remember it's not completely on you to solve the problems. A good CEO is there to work with the team when/if problems arise.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

In this video, UniMelb students share their ideas about how to work effectively in group assessments	LINK
In this video, UniMelb students share their thoughts on how to effectively work in teams.	LINK
A series of videos based around a book on career skills. Some are for students, some are for teachers.	LINK
Team and Self-reflection sheets	LINK