



Group work: dealing with challenges

Working on an assignment with other people can be more challenging than working on it alone. However, it is an opportunity for you to practice management and teamwork skills that will prepare you for similar situations in the workforce. Factors such as personality, different study, work, family and social commitments as well as variations in skill sets can impact on how well you work as a group. To minimise challenges follow the guidelines for establishing and maintaining your group in the 'Group work' resource. If you still find that things are not working, don't ignore the problem. Here are some examples of common challenges and strategies for handling them.

Problem: Task progress has fallen behind the set timeline

Possible strategies:

- Talk about this as a team, and look back at your group protocols to remind each other of the norms you had set.
- Discuss why this may have happened and what your group will do to get back on track. If necessary, adjust your group protocols to help avoid falling behind further in your progress.

Problem: A group member is missing meetings and/or not completing tasks on time

There may be a range of reasons why a group member is not managing to complete agreed tasks. They may be very busy with family or other commitments, be unsure of how to carry out the task, or have different cultural expectations of group work. However this does not mean they can ignore their responsibilities to the group, and it is important to work through these issues together.

Possible strategies:

- As a group, be flexible in finding ways to contribute equally and make sure the process for allocating tasks is fair. Students with particular cultural backgrounds may prefer not to volunteer first for a task but politely wait to be asked. Allowing enough thoughtful discussion at an early stage might reduce the risk of group members not completing tasks later.
- Find out why a group member is not participating.
 - Be sympathetic to genuine or unexpected problems group members may experience, and be willing to compromise when appropriate.
 - If a group member is having problems with research or is unsure of what to do, offer advice and encourage them to continue with the task.
 - Try to negotiate where cultural differences and work styles affect the collaborative group process.
- If you have tried some of these strategies and the group member is still not producing work according to the agreed schedule, contact your tutor or Course Coordinator well before the final due date – don't leave it to the last minute.



Problem: Someone is dominating the discussions or will not compromise

Possible strategies:

- Group members take turns in chairing each meeting. The chair makes sure the discussions are kept to a time limit, and that everyone has had a chance to contribute and report back on the work they have done.
- Politely acknowledge what the dominant group member has to say, and use appropriate language to move the conversation on to the next group member and/or topic.
- Use appropriate verbal and non-verbal language to interrupt one another. Be professional and collegial.
- If the group member continues to dominate, choose a willing member of the group to talk to them privately, outlining the group's concerns.

Problem: A group member does not engage in the group discussions

Possible strategies:

- Avoid being judgemental - don't assume that the group member is being lazy or disinterested in the group work. Find out why they are not engaging.
- Encourage shy members to take part by using questions to involve them in the discussion.
- Some students may be slower at responding to discussion points due to language reasons. Encourage them by giving them time to speak. Acknowledge what they contribute by responding and/or asking them further questions.
- Some students may have a disability but be unwilling to share this with the group. Be sensitive to this possibility in your group behaviours. Be familiar with the University's policies on [diversity, equity and anti discrimination](#).

Problem: Your discussion is going nowhere (e.g. arguments are repeated /discussion is off topic / information is lacking / decisions are not being made)

Possible strategies:

- Group members take turns in chairing each meeting. The chair makes sure the contributions are on topic and kept to a time limit.
- If there is strong disagreement on a topic between group members, the chair can suggest returning to it at the end if there is time. If there is no time, put it on the agenda for the next meeting. Suggest that the group members in the meantime find a solution to discuss.
- Be prepared to negotiate and/or compromise in order to move on.

Problem: Contributions of some group members don't meet the level of quality you expect (e.g. limited research, poor presentation, incorrect spelling)

Possible strategies:

- Reflect on whether your expectations are reasonable. Both at uni and in the workplace people bring different levels of skill and commitment to tasks.
- Did you all discuss and agree to certain expectations when you started the assignment? If so, reaffirm these expectations with one another and encourage the group member to review their contribution accordingly.



- If time allows, proofread and edit your group assignment together to reach an agreement on the overall quality of the work.
- Discuss the issue with your course coordinator.
- Make a group appointment with a Learning Adviser for advice and helpful strategies.

Problem: Your group is unclear about the assignment (e.g. requirements or key concepts)

Possible strategies:

- Revisit and discuss the course outline and any other task guidelines.
- If you still don't understand, contact your tutor or lecturer as a group.

Problem: The group dynamics are simply not working despite your efforts

Possible strategies:

- If you have tried a number of strategies to improve the way your group works but with little success, contact your tutor for advice. Do this well before the final due date.