

# Working in a Group

Research shows that a group of peers engaging each other in discussion and projects is a key factor to student learning and achievement. This is even more important in online courses where students can easily feel isolated. Working together with your classmates improves your communication skills and forces you to consider and incorporate other points of view strengthening your own knowledge of a topic. Learning to manage tasks and efficiently complete assignments as a group is also a useful workplace skill that most jobs require to some degree.

Working in a group may be beneficial, but it's not always easy... especially at a distance. Here are a few strategies to help smooth the process.

## Getting Started

- Review assignment requirements.  
Carefully read through any guidelines the instructor provided. Determine what the project will entail. What actually needs to be submitted?
- Don't just start working on the project.  
Take a little time to get acquainted with each other and exchange contact information.  
Discuss the project. Identify the goals and make sure everyone agrees on the final goal.  
You may wish to meet online using *Skype for Business* to do this first step.

## Planning

- Create a plan.  
What needs to be done? Draft a list of each of the tasks and sub-tasks that need to be completed to achieve your goal.
- Assign roles and tasks.  
Who will work on each part of the assignment?
- Create a schedule.  
Work backwards from the final due date for the project in order to set realistic due dates for when each project task needs to be completed.  
Build in times to get feedback from each other.
- Select what technology you will use.  
Your instructor may determine this for you, but you may have some options for deciding how you will collaborate and communicate. For example, you may want to use email or Skype to communicate and a wiki or OneDrive to co-edit a project.
- Stay flexible and adjust your plan as needed.

## Listening and Communicating

- Listen carefully. Make sure you understand what the other person is sharing before offering suggestions.
- Don't attack others' opinions and work. Offer constructive feedback on the work, not on the person.
- Don't rush in and rescue a group member that is struggling.  
Offer suggestions if asked, but it is their responsibility to complete their own part of the project. Rescuing assumes the other person can't solve his or her own problems.
- Address issues within the group early. Don't wait until the night before the project is due.
- Communicate issues you are unable to resolve to your instructor.  
Try to resolve it within the group first, but if a group member isn't responding or doing his/her work, let your instructor know.

