

## Four tips on effective teamwork

Learn some tips and ideas how effectively organise and complete your teamwork.

A team assignment gives you an opportunity to acquire the skills you will need to become an effective team player in the workplace. The ability to be a good team player is one of the top ten graduate attributes employers want. Almost all jobs require interaction with others, the ability to work in a team, and the ability to achieve a result. Doing well in a team project at university could help you to get the job you wish for!

While a team project can be challenging, many of these difficulties can be overcome if you take on board the tips provided in this guide.

### 1. Manage your time

Time management is important in studying efficiently and avoiding spending too much time on the team assignment. Try [this quiz](#) to test your time management skills.

- **Prepare a to-do list** - prioritise the goals from most to least important and consider which tasks requiring lots of feedback from other team members as they will need to be done sooner.
- **Set aside time to work regularly on the to-do list** - set a deadline for each goal, for example for the discussion section of the report finish 300 words by Tuesday, a piece of code by Thursday, and a reflective piece by next Monday.
- **Do not procrastinate** - break down tasks into small parts so that you do not have to do a lot at once, set deadlines with your team and use them to hold each other accountable.
- **Focus during your study** – it is best to focus for 50-90 minutes at a time. Less than 50 minutes does not give you time to focus or be effective, and after 90 your brain gets tired and it is good to have a break. Do not spend time for checking emails or Facebook because you will lose a concentration and it will take you time to refocus on what you were doing before.

### 2. Manage your workload

Leaving things to the last minute can be a big issue for students, but it is far worse when multiplied by the number of people in your team that affects your whole team, so you need to start out with an idea of what needs to be done by when. Start out with planning an assignment timeline, and ways to ensure that if something goes wrong you have enough time to deal with it.

- **Include buffer time in each assignment** - it can be used if someone in your team cannot finish something on time and also to allow for group discussions and

dynamics. Discussions are necessary but can take up a lot of time because you will need extra time to discuss the assignment and put it together.

- **Plan your assignment timeline from the start, rather than the finish** - this means that if it will take you a week to do each stage of an assignment and you have three stages, aim to finish in three weeks. Do not assume that you can start three weeks before the assignment is due because it is harder to do everything last minute for a team assignment.
- **Have mini-deadlines for each stage of the assignment** – It is a good idea to set actions in an end of each team meeting to ensure that you always making progress, and each team member is accountable for doing something regularly. This way if someone does not finish their task, the rest of the team will have advance warning and take an action, rather than finding out the day before the assignment is due.
- **Be realistic with timing** - everyone in your team has a life outside this assignment, and might have other assignments due around the same time. You need to take this into consideration when planning your timeline.

### 3. Create rules in your team

So you have been assigned to a team to do an assignment together, and you probably do not know most of the people in your team. Many people in your team may work differently to you and want different things. This can cause major issues, therefore at the start of the assignment set some rules in your team. Rules are a good way to ensure that everyone in your team has the same expectations of each other. This will avoid frustration and misunderstandings during the project. These rules need to be agreed on by all team members at the start of the project, ideally in the first meeting. The most important thing with setting team rules is that everyone is honest about what they want, expect, and can contribute. Team members also need to be prepared to hold each other to the rules, and to implement the consequences if someone breaks them.

An example of the team rules:

- **Time spent in team meetings**, e.g. 1 hour per week.
- **Meeting behaviour**, e.g. show up 5 minutes early, let everyone know 2 days in advance if you cannot make it.
- **Amount of work done individually**, e.g. research portion, rough drafts of each part, a piece of code.
- **Timeline**, e.g. agree on a deadline for the project draft.
- **Communication between meetings**, e.g. reply on Slack within 1 day
- **Consequence for not finishing an individual task on time/to a high enough standard**, e.g. report to the tutor on the group discussion forum.

- **Consequence for not finishing an individual task/not contributing fairly**, e.g. a team will provide feedback on a teammate review who is responsible for that part and ask the tutor to take this into consideration when marking.

Download the blank team rules template for creating your own rules. You may wish to sign the list of team rules because by doing this you are all committing to the rules, and you can use the agreed consequences to reinforce the guidelines and sort out most issues within the team.

#### 4. Choose a team leader who will manage meetings

Meetings can be one of the most time-consuming aspects of team assignments, but they are an important part of working as a team. Here are some tips on organising an effective meeting in 1–2 hours and how to make sure you finish on time.

- **All meetings should have agendas** - meeting agendas ensure that you know what you are going to talk about and you know how long the meeting will be so you do not waste your time.
- **Set a start and finish time to the meeting, and stick to those** - allow enough time for each item on the agenda but, if some items go on for a while, and if they are not discussed thoroughly, then follow up this item on the next meeting.
- **Meetings that run over time can get sloppy** - any more than one hour for a meeting usually does not achieve anything new. If you get through the agenda faster than you expected, then finish early and enjoy the extra time.
- **Have a timekeeper and someone to take minutes for each meeting** - the timekeeper should make sure that you do not go over time on agenda items, and the minute-taker should keep a record of who came, what was discussed, and the outcomes and action points.

Here is an example of a meeting agenda:

1. Check-in - updates from everyone since the last meeting: what they have been doing and their progress.
2. Discussion Points - discussion of each part of the project that you are currently working on: this is to get input and feedback from the whole group.
3. Finish with a list of action steps for everyone to complete before the next meeting - these can be built up during the meeting after each discussion point: review these at the end of the meeting as a further reminder and ensure that everyone is clear on their responsibilities.
4. After the meeting the minute taker should email a copy of the minutes to all the team members. This ensures that everyone is clear about what they are doing, and that any team members who failed to attend know what is happening.

Download a blank template for developing a meeting agenda for your team.