

10 TIPS FOR WORKING EFFECTIVELY IN GROUPS

- 1. Listen actively:** Foster a productive environment for discussion by actively listening to what your group members have to say. Pay close attention to what you hear, resist the urge to interrupt, and clarify your understanding by paraphrasing or summarizing others' comments. If your group members seem hesitant to express themselves, take the lead by voicing your own ideas. Saying what is on your mind will demonstrate to your group members that it is okay to take risks and it will encourage a positive group dynamic.
- 2. Establish a common goal:** Do not assume that because you are in a group everyone shares the same goal. Take a few moments to go over the purpose of the group session and to determine what each individual would like to get out of it. If the main goal of meeting is unclear, devote some time to brainstorming or concept mapping to define a shared objective.
- 3. Assign roles:** Everyone who participates in a group has their own particular strengths and weaknesses. Have an honest conversation with other group members about what they believe they can contribute to the group and base individual roles on tasks and activities that each person feels confident they can fulfill.
- 4. Create a timeline:** If your group plans to meet regularly, establish a timeline of events with specific dates and deadlines. Discuss what is required and who is expected to do what and when.
- 5. Outline your objectives:** At the beginning of every group session, take a couple of minutes to outline what you hope to accomplish as a group. Defining objectives can help clarify any confusion that might hinder progress. Similarly, before going your separate ways, reflect on what was covered in your session and make sure everyone knows what is expected of them for future meetings.
- 6. Divide and conquer:** If you are collaborating with a group on a large project, it may be in your best interests to divide the entire assignment into smaller, more manageable tasks. Individual members of the group, or even sub-groups, can then be assigned to primary areas of responsibility.
- 7. Be wary of "groupthink":** When working in groups, we are prone to altering our opinions, views, and/or perspectives so that they fall in line with what we believe the rest of the group is thinking. This kind of thinking (known as "groupthink") can cause a group of people to make a decision that the members of the group would disagree with as individuals. Remember, working in groups doesn't necessarily mean conforming to groups. If you disagree with a decision or direction the group is taking, voice your own point of view.
- 8. Resolve conflicts quickly and fairly:** Conflicts of opinion often arise in challenging and effective group work. Although we are accustomed to seeing a "winner" and a "loser" in the resolution of a conflict, the effective use of compromise does not need either. There is no need to avoid conflicts, as they can be a healthy part of rational group discussions. Conflicts do, however, need to be resolved immediately if the group is to function properly.
- 9. Exchange contact information:** If you are planning to participate in regular group work, generate a list of everyone's phone number and email address. Give every group member a copy of the list so that you all know how to contact each other.
- 10. Book a group study room:** When looking for a place to meet, consider booking one of the many group use rooms available through the library. Just visit <http://library.macewan.ca> to view available rooms and to book one.

For more information on this and other topics, check out the Success Series Workshops!

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