Collaborating in Groups

Collaborating in groups applies to more than just working on a project or presentation in a group. You may also collaborate in a group when studying for a class. When working together, there are some things that help make the experience work more smoothly allowing you to get more out of the session.

Some Ground Rules

When collaborating in groups, establishing a few ground rules allow for a more productive use of time.

- Respect everyone’s ideas and thoughts even if they differ from your own. They may bring to light an aspect you haven’t thought of or help bring about a discussion that could help you and others in the group further their understanding of the topic.

- Be sure everybody participates. Don’t let anybody get left out or passed over.

- Ask questions. There is no such thing as a bad question, so throw it out there. It’s common that someone else had the same question, so you will be helping them as well as yourself.

- Set the purpose for the group. This will help in staying on task and getting the most possible out of the experience. If the group gets off task, which is inevitable, kindly remind them of the task at hand.

- Ask if anybody else in the group has a ground rule they would like to add.

Set Up a Schedule

A schedule should be established that meets the needs of the entire group in order to complete the task at hand in a timely manner.

- Schedule in reverse to keep the due date, test date, etc. in mind, but be careful not to procrastinate. Procrastinating will lead to rushing causing the group to not get as much work done, do sloppy work, or not understand everything they were working on.

- Agree on a meeting place that everyone can get to without making anyone in the group go too far out of their way. This will ensure that everyone from the group attends.

- Set goals for the group to achieve. In order to meet these goals, create milestones to be met at specific points. This will help the group stay on task and get the most out of the meeting.

- Assess progress at different points. This will show you how well you are sticking to your goals and if you need to take another look at the goals and schedule to possibly alter it in order to fulfill the goals you have set for the group.
Manage the Group
Managing the group will help everyone stay on task and will also make sure that the group completes the task at hand. This will help in the success of the collaboration.

- Get everyone’s contact information. This will allow for communication outside of the meetings. Work from the known to the unknown. This will help everyone feel more comfortable as well as build a base for the unknown information.

- Give each member a role and responsibility. This will allow for the meetings to run more smoothly so the maximum amount of information can be addressed each time.

- Take note of each person’s strengths and weaknesses. Each group member’s strengths can be used to benefit the group.

- If it is a large group, perhaps break off into smaller groups and have each group work on a specific aspect. Then have each of the smaller groups come back together to discuss what they worked on with the rest of the group.

- Assign each person with a question pertaining to the topic. After an amount of time, come back together to discuss each of the questions as a whole.

- Use an exercise, scenario, or case study to get everyone involved. Keeping the entire group involved will help the group succeed as a whole and will ensure that each member gets the most out of the meetings.

- Should conflict arise, as is sometimes the case, be sure it remains respectful and doesn’t get out of hand. A little debating can bring up new ideas and avenues to expand the group’s purpose. It can also help when playing devil’s advocate in reinforcing the group’s purpose. However, try to maintain a calm atmosphere where group members are comfortable expressing their ideas.

- Start an online group (i.e. on Black Board)

- Keep in mind to critique using honesty and kindness, commit to goals, keep a positive attitude, keep a light and airy mood, be responsible, and be prepared.

For more info:
Engage.wisc.edu/collaboration/rubrics/index.html
“Leading a Discussion” handout