

Get the Best out of your Group Project

Members Commit to the Group and the Project

Part of functioning in a group is to have a common vision, common goals, and a common mission even though you may work independently on a project; and to understand that you and your work represent the group. Your individual commitment is critical to group function.

Becoming a Team

A Team is two or more people; working together; on a Common Goal (or goals). Groups become Teams if this is in place and attention is paid to both interpersonal and task functions.

The Team Must Decide how to Communicate Effectively (Interpersonal)

Each Team must set up their own guidelines for good communication and a Team Charter. Through discussion and negotiation, the members choose the items that are most important for their clear communication as a Team. These often include commitment to:

- Respect and Listen to others
- Not blame (work hard on the problem, not on the person)
- Group members and Project process
- Supportive and Constructive Feedback
- Agreed upon Goals and Clear Timelines
- Positive interdependence (sink or swim together)
- Individual Accountability (say what you will do and do it)
- Analysis of work done and Planning for next steps
- Process for conflict and Problem Management

The Team must Decide what is Important and Measure This (Task)

Early in the formation of the group, the members must decide what will be measured in the process. These items are generally critical to success and for the group to become an Effective Team.

- Came prepared
- Offered ideas and suggestions
- Provided information
- Asked for clarification/feedback
- Identified resources
- Solicited others' participation
- Kept group on task
- Was easy to work with
- Prepared materials
- Made presentation
- Participated in discussions
- Managed group conflict

The Team must Acknowledge Success and Aim for Improvement

What have we done (individually and collectively) to meet our goals and keep the Team Charter?

How can we do better for next time? (Next steps)

The Team Celebrates!

Celebrate what you have accomplished and then refocus your efforts for greater success

Get the Best out of your Group Project

You want to do well in your courses. You have worked out all your schedules. You attend all your classes. You have a place to study that works for you. Now you are staring at that big project that you need to get started on, but you can't figure out where to begin, and your anxiety is rising. Does this sound familiar? You are not alone – this is a situation facing many students. The feeling of paralysis and being unable to follow through is sometimes called procrastination, but it does not have to take over. Try some of the techniques below.

Consider your Anxiety as Excitement

In your academic studies you will always be facing new ideas, new challenges, and trying to do what you have never done before. It is perfectly natural to feel uneasy about these new things. Consider that anxiety is a form of excitement (which it is). Think about a challenge that you have faced and remember the exhilaration of achieving success. Build on your past successes, take a deep breath, and move forward.

Set Your Goal(s)

The first and most self-motivating action step is to decide what you want from each project. Do you have a grade goal? Is this a group or team project with marks attached to how well you work together? Consider what you will gain from the assignment and how your competence will improve. Where does this assignment fit into the larger picture of what you are aiming for? Imagine a time when you look back on this successful project. By focusing on what you want and need, you direct your energies and self-motivation to get things done for you.

Analyze the Assignment

Pull out your assignment sheet and start to identify the keywords and items that the Instructor wants. Make a list of them down the left hand side of a document. To the right of each item, list the criteria for successfully achieving it. This creates a rubric that you can use as you work to check off the elements that you have completed as you progress. You now have a clear idea about what is needed and it is no longer a black box.

Break the Project into Chunks

Group the tasks into chunks that fit together. A large project might have ten or more them. You will often start with an outline, then do research, then compare information, and so on. There will be a conclusion and/or recommendations at the end. Other items, such as graphics, will be there depending on the assignment. Each chunk should be seen by you as a piece that is small enough to complete successfully.

Create a Timeline

Order the tasks in a logical sequence and assign times to get them done. Research is early in your schedule. Conclusions will come near the end. You now have a written plan that you can refer to as you go along.

Do One Thing at a Time

Pick the first item and get started. Get excited about doing it. Enjoy the positive sensation of having it done and checked it off your list. If you still feel overwhelmed, go back two steps, break this task into smaller pieces, and do the chunks one at a time. You want to see yourself doing each step and succeeding in getting it done.

Take Regular Breaks

Build break time into your studies. Take 10 minutes off to do something you want to do every hour. After three hours stop for a longer break that might include a snack or a meal. After six hours, put your studies aside until tomorrow. This helps you keep up your positive excitement about the parts that you are doing.

Review Your Progress

At the end of each piece of the project that you complete, sit back and review your plan to see how much you have done. Adjust times as necessary. Remember your personal goals for the project and keep at it!

For more strategies see: <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~koconne1/605TheAdultLearner/obstacles.htm>