Introduction to effective group work

This post will introduce you to some of the most common types of group work at university. If you’re new to group work you might want to start by looking through [all of our group work resources here](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/students/training-and-skills-support/my-learning-essentials/online-resources/?level2Links=group+work).

Group work forms an important part of your time at university. Not only is it a great opportunity to share ideas and learn from other people, it often forms part of your assessment. You will often be asked to work in a group with people you don’t know.

In order to be successful you need to be able to turn your group from a bunch of individuals into a team working towards a common purpose. This isn’t always easy but it will be vital to the success of any shared project that you undertake.

# What is group work?

Put simply, group work means working alongside two or more other people to reach a shared objective, goal or purpose. When done well it allows us to achieve far more than we could hope to on our own.

“Groups are smart… and often smarter than the smartest people in them” (Surowiecki, 2005)

Group work is common in study and the workplace. It allows different tasks to be worked on simultaneously, to save time and remove duplication. Often this means tasks are divided up according to who is most suited to them.

As a student, group work is also an opportunity to learn from your peers. You will develop your skills in working collaboratively, and share your knowledge and experience across the group.

When group work goes well it can be one of the most effective learning experiences there is, so it’s common for it to form part of assessment.

**If you get asked to complete a piece of group work, look at it as an opportunity to try new things and develop.**

This doesn’t mean group work is without it’s challenges. Getting people together, sticking to deadlines, and keeping a group focus (rather than focusing on their own individual contributions) can cause issues.

**Tip:** While you are contributing to group work, it is important to ensure that your contribution is distinguished from the contribution of others. **Failure to clearly differentiate your input can result in plagiarism**. Find out how to [avoid plagiarism through good academic practice](https://medium.com/my-learning-essentials/avoiding-plagiarism-through-good-academic-practice-bbcabfc1eed0)*.*

# Assessing group work

The most common reason you will have for undertaking group work at university is because you have to!

For assessed work, you often won’t have a choice over who you work with. This is why it is important that you get to know your group’s skills and experience.

The most common types of assessment in group work are **presentations** and **peer assessed projects**.

## Group **Presentations**

There are lots of things to consider here. The main thing (as with all assessments) is to understand the marking criteria.

Will you be marked on your presentation slides? Your transcript? Your delivery of the presentation? Or maybe it will be all of these?

Presentations usually provide a good opportunity to divide work up according to people’s skills and abilities. For example, if you have someone who is very good at creating infographics then asking them to contribute to the design of the presentation slides is a good idea. This does not mean they should do it all, after all what are they learning? Try to consider opportunities where you can try something you haven’t before, with support from more experienced group members.

If you’re working on a group work presentation, why not try our [Library support for Presentations](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/packages/presentations/) resource for help with planning, designing and delivering your presentation.

## **Peer Assessed group work**

You may be asked to mark each other’s contributions to the group work project. When you are doing this it is very important that you agree, ahead of time, how you are going to do this. Equal and fair weighting needs to be given to the different areas you work on, and all members of your team will need to be sure about how you will go about allocating your individual marks to each other.