Group Work - Six Steps to Success

When group work is introduced there is often a collective sigh or gasp of dismay. This can be for a whole host of reasons including previous negative experiences or concern about working with others and having personal success tied to others.

It is our firm belief that group work can be a profoundly positive experience if groups get off to a good start and use practical tools to manage their time and communications.

1. Do you all know each other?

When your group meet for the first time it's vital that you spend a short time getting to know each other. Ask everyone to briefly introduce and say a little bit about themselves. You can also consider using an icebreaker activity to facilitate this conversation. Knowing more about who is in your group and what their interests, skills and experiences are can greatly increase the productivity of a group. (See **Icebreakers** resource. For small groups the "Getting to know" activity can particularly successful).

2. Make sure everyone feels valued and listening to

Create a safe space for everyone to contribute:

- As a group create a list of behaviours that group members should abide by. This is often referred to as a group contract and normally includes points about how individuals should treat each other and how the group should communicate and operate. (See **Group Contract** resource).

- Go round the group at the start of each meeting and ask what each person would like to discuss and ensure time is allowed for everything to be covered. Consider using a meeting agenda to capture this. (See **Agenda** resource).

- In discussions consider asking people to raise their hand in order to speak or have a nominated item (pen, ball, spoon etc) that individuals must be holding in order to speak. Avoid speaking over each other or allowing individuals to dominate discussion (See **Working with Others** resource for more techniques).

- If anyone has become disengaged try to speak with them as soon as possible in order to find out if there is anything the group can do to help them become more involved. The person may have very valid reasons for not engaging so it is important not to simply assume someone is lazy or not interested in working with the group.

3. Does the group have a good understanding of the task?

Reading the assignment brief together and highlighting key phrases/words can help make sure everyone understands the task. This provides an opportunity to discuss any points people have different views on. If there are any aspects of the assignment the group is unsure about you can go back to your tutor and seek clarification sooner rather than later. Capturing the requirements of your client, or creating a client, can help focus you're planning. (See **Personas** resource).

4. Is everyone clear about what they are being asked to do?

Using a group work planner in meetings can help make it clear who has agreed to do what and when they are expected to completed the task by. (See **Group Work Planner** resource).

Groups can benefit from having agreed roles in order to provide structure and direction. You can play to a team's strengths by allocating roles to individuals most suited to tasks or rotate responsibilities on a meeting by meeting basis to ensure everyone has the opportunity experience each role. (See **Group Work Roles** resource).

5. Keep in touch

Communication - keep in regular contact with your group to ensure problems are identified and dealt with early.
Collaboration - consider using collaborative tools (such as Google Drive and Trello) to share progress and maximise time between meetings.
Consideration - If anyone is unable to attend a meeting make sure they still have the opportunity to contribute. Ask them to provide any updates or questions in an email to be shared at the meeting and then ensure updates/decisions are relayed back to them.

6. Reflect on your own strengths and weaknesses

If you want to develop our own skills it is important to gain a greater understanding of your own strengths and weaknesses. There are many tools available to help with this but we recommend **16 Personalities** (.com).

Finally, there is a tendency in group work to blame others for any problems and not consider our own behaviour and approached. Reflection allows us to review our own actions and help us process difficult situations. (See **Reflection** resource).