



## Group work 101

### Partners and collaborators

Group work helps you to practise for future jobs where you might be part of a team. It's important to get along with people who are different from you, even if you might not normally hang out with them. You can achieve more as a group than you can alone, and sharing the load will mean everyone gets to perform different tasks and maybe learn new skills.

At university, teachers assign group work for assessments so that you can practise being part of a team and working with a diverse group of people. Teachers also organise group work in tutorials so that you can talk to other students and hear different points of view. When you explain your ideas to other people the process helps you to examine your own thoughts. By listening to other people you learn new ideas and points of view.



Good group work comes from teamwork and communication. It's important to allocate roles and tasks fairly, according to individual strengths – so it's important to know what you're good at also. Good teams communicate regularly, keep notes, focus on their goal and commit to the task. It also helps if you can have some fun!

### Preparation

If you've been allocated to a specific group for an assignment or are about to join a project team at work, it's a good idea to assess the project you're about to undertake, your team, and what you might need to do to get you through.

You might be feeling a positive or negative reaction towards the idea of group work, depending on your past experiences. Unlike teamwork situations in school, sport, or your personal life, there are professional standards that you must meet in your university studies and the workplace. Before diving into group dynamics, communications, personalities, and schedules, you should assess both your concerns and prospects and how you might troubleshoot these issues as your project progresses.

### Self-assess

There are a number of assessment models you can use to evaluate your teamwork situation. One fairly simple approach is a SWOT analysis. This system allows you to assess the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of your group work task. By evaluating the risks you are better placed to address them at the start of your collaboration.

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## Example

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SWOT	Example Assessment	Solutions
Strengths	Your strengths → I am highly organised and enjoy co-ordinating projects from start to finish.	
	Your teammates' strengths (if known) → Ali is a genius at data manipulation. → Sara is an excellent writer.	
Weaknesses	Your areas for improvement → I feel shy around new people and take a while before I feel comfortable voicing my opinion in front of others.	Energiser/ice breaker games; shared meal or socialising
	Your teammates' areas for improvement (if known) → I don't know my team well enough. → Ali is pretty opinionated and can dominate discussions.	Energiser/ice breaker games Establish clear expectations about roles or jobs and equal contributions
Opportunities	For You → Be challenged by others, different ways of thinking and doing → Grow outside of my comfort zone → Build skills in team dynamics, public speaking and project management	
	For Your Team → Make new friends, real working partners → Complete an amazing project	
Threats	For You → If I don't dedicate enough time to make my individual contribution each week, I won't get the work done	Set a project timeline, assign roles and jobs, allocate specific time in your schedule to complete tasks
	For Your Team → An unfair and unequal allocation of the workload	Establish clear expectations about roles or jobs and equal contributions

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## Wrapping up

As your team project comes to an end it's critical to set aside time to wrap up, not only to celebrate completing a job and achieving great results, but also to debrief on your individual and group learning experiences and performance.

Successful people use reflection to learn more about themselves, recognising where they were and where they are now. Reflection is also a tool to help people refine their interpersonal skills in how they read and respond to teammates. Did you misread Ali's reaction to your idea as non-supportive when it was actually surprise and an 'aha!' moment in his head? Did Sara ignore your frustration with her constant late submissions?

Debriefs are useful to reflect on your performance and consider ways to address areas of need to make improvements in the future. See [Reflecting on progress](#) for a range of debrief strategies.

## More information

Here are some other websites that talk about how to get the best out of group work, and other places to get information or support:

- Visit the [Counselling Service vUWS](#) site and download the *Group Work and Public Speaking Skills iBook*.
- Use the [Careers Service Careers Toolkit](#) to take short courses on team work.
- Have a look at the [PASS website](#) and the PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) [Timetable](#), as well as a [list of PASS units](#).
- Visit [University of Technology, Sydney: Group Work](#).



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Kim Heckenberg (Manager)	Katrina Trewin
Linda Parker (Manager)	Claire Urbach
Tahlia Birnbaum	Anna Wallace
Tae McKnight	Fiona Webber
Beverley Miles	Lisa Worthington
Sara Perley	