



Group Assessments: Teamwork.

Whatever your subject, you could be set assignments that require you to work in groups. One of the reasons for this is that employers look for effective team members.

This handout first gives an overview of groupwork. It then provides a table giving a description of what how groups might work, how this feels, and what its effectiveness. After that, it highlights potential pitfalls when moving from a group to a team, and what you can do to avoid them from the start. The suggestions can be revisited if problems arise later. Finally, it shows how you could set up your group to be a successful team.

Overview:

Working closely with others is not always easy. It takes a while for a group to become a team capable of effectively exploring new research and reaching new grades. It is always worth being uncritical of others at the outset. This ensures a base of social responsibility where punctuality, tact and respect naturally follow. Even if you are confident in a group, it is worth noting one dominant individual who assumes leadership can create tension and block the flow of ideas from the others. The individual contributions, if managed well in the group, are what can make the opportunities of team-based research greater than from independent study. The social interaction skills of collaboration need to be adapted to your specific group. The skill of moving between independent and interdependent research is an essential part of teamwork which a tutor may consider part of the marking criteria.

Table of group types and their effects:

Description.	How it feels.	What it produces.
You are with friends and having a great time.	It feels comfortable.	It produces nothing very academic.
Your group cannot identify its purpose and cannot work out a way forward.	It feels confusing.	It produces not a lot.
Your group has a clear direction, but there is no agreement about how to move forward.	It feels frustrating.	It produces not a lot.
Your group has a clear direction and "collective ownership" plans of how to get there.	It feels focussed, yet with the feeling you could support each other more.	It can produce a good outcome.
Your group takes shared ownership of plans, has mutual interdependence and shared concern for each other's contributions.	It feels focussed and supported, with a desire to work with these people again.	It produces an excellent outcome with new personal skills and abilities developed.

These scenarios are developed from Katzenbach and Smith's 'typology' of group and team characteristics. They set good goals for improving social skills to help you to make a group of friends and/or strangers into a team. Why does this not happen every time?

Pitfalls and setting up a group:

The psychology of group decision making can be as complex as the individual personalities involved. Overcoming personal personality differences and negative feelings in the move towards a common goal is a chance to open up lines of communication, innovation and creativity. This section first covers pitfalls, and then group set-up. The information is adapted from: Ramsay, Maier and Price (2010). *Study skills for Business and Management Students*. Harlow: Pearson).

Pitfalls when moving from a group to a team: four questions to ask:

- Are you committed?
- Are the objectives clear?
- Have you planned all the tasks and subtasks needed?
- Are you all happy with the roles you have for the common goal?

Problems can also be caused by language difficulties and students not seeming to pull their weight in a group. Therefore, it is essential to establish a positive first meeting with some basic rules.

Setting up a Group:

1. Each group member introduces themselves and summarises what they may bring to the team as regards their learning and study role.
2. Everyone agrees a set of ground rules such as the right to devils advocacy before any final decision is reached, punctuality, majority voting in conflict resolution, casting vote of chairman/woman.
3. Read and discuss the assignment brief together.
4. Divide the brief into sub tasks.
5. Discuss and agree roles.
6. Nominate a leader for the team who will keep notes on meetings, and manage communication between members.
7. To plan your actions, you should:
 - Allocate team members to various tasks
 - Agree to support each other
 - Draw up time plan and deadlines for sub tasks
 - Agree a social media platform for communication
 - Confirm next meeting

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