

Suggestions for working in groups

Brian Martin, August 1997

Beginnings

- Exchange names, addresses and phone numbers.
- Agree on suitable times and places to hold meetings.
- Have someone responsible for arranging the next group meeting.
- Find out about each other's skills and interests.

Group process

- Be on time.
- Always help everyone to participate in discussion and activities. Don't let one or two people dominate.
 - For each meeting, appoint one person as facilitator. That person's responsibility is not to run the meeting, but to help the group operate smoothly. The facilitator should make sure the discussion stays on the topic, make sure everyone has a chance to speak, make sure agenda items are covered in a reasonable time, and moderate in the case of disagreements. Rotate the position of facilitator among group members.
 - For each meeting, appoint one person as scribe. The scribe's responsibility is to take minutes, including recording attendance.

What happens

- Set the agenda: list all agenda items, put them in an order, and finally put tentative times by each item. [These times can be changed by agreement. The aim in setting them is to avoid spending too much time on minor issues.]
 - Report on work done since the last meeting and note this in the minutes.
 - Assign tasks to each person, and note these in the minutes. If a good idea is raised in the meeting, don't discuss it further unless someone agrees to do the work.
 - Take short breaks occasionally.

Warnings

- Plan the task carefully and get to work early. Don't leave masses of work to the last minute.
 - No individual should take unilateral action—such as sending off a letter or undertaking an interview—without prior agreement from other group members. If in doubt about any proposed action, consult your tutor or lecturer.

Extras

- Build on the strengths of group members, and help each other in areas of weakness.

- Humour brightens up a dull meeting.