

Working Successfully in a Team (Based Learning Environment)¹

Individuals offer a diversity of knowledge, experiences, and styles. Diversity is welcome...what do you bring? Bringing this diversity together through collaborative learning has been proven to have greater potential to produce stronger academic achievement than other kinds of learning environments.² Working in a team allows us to learn from one another, capitalizing on one another's strengths. Weaving diverse expectations and communication styles has great potential for achievement and reward but also presents great challenge. Success is not automatically guaranteed as most people have not but taught how to succeed (and help their team succeed) in collaborative learning environments.

In order to function well as a team, I would like you to focus on: 1) how you can contribute; 2) communicating effectively (using respectful words and listening actively); and 3) including everyone.

To get started, reflect for a moment on how you tend to or like to work within a group. Think back to your previous experiences working in groups (ie: in classes, student organizations, work settings, volunteer projects, etc.). Based on those experiences place a mark next to each item that describes your group work style or challenge(s).

My Group Work Style...

- I prefer to take time for individual reflection before sharing my ideas with a group.
- I prefer to work through my ideas by sharing them out loud to a group.
- I feel most comfortable participating in a group when it is my turn to speak (for example, someone asks me my opinion; we go around in a circle and everyone has a turn.)
- I feel most comfortable participating in a group when there is no structure and I am able to contribute whenever I desire.
- When someone expresses an idea I disagree with, I usually am silent and stop participating.
- When someone expresses an idea I disagree with, I usually express my differing opinion right then.
- When someone expresses an idea I disagree with, I usually confront them afterwards in private.
- I prefer to accomplish tasks individually and then share them with the group.

¹ Adapted from:

Black, Kaplan, Kardia, POD 10/97 Workshop on Workshops, CRLT, University of Michigan

Conversation with Ronit Ajlen and the University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching

The Teaching Center Washington University, St. Louis "Using Roles in Group Work."

<https://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/resources/active-learning/group-work-in-class/using-roles-in-group-work/>

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The University of Waterloo Centre for Teaching Excellence Teamwork skills pages <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/tips-students/being-part-team/teamwork-skills-being-effective-group-member> 2019

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² Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., and Smith, K.A. (2006). *Active learning: Cooperation in the university classroom*. Edina, MN: Interaction.

_____ I prefer to work in close collaboration with other people in a group (for example, everyone contributing simultaneously.)

Now, reflect on your group work challenges:

My Group Work Challenges...

My personal challenges as a group member include...

- _____ Talking more than others in the group
- _____ Taking on the majority of the group tasks
- _____ Interrupting other group members
- _____ Not sharing or offering my opinion during conversations
- _____ Disengaging when someone says something I disagree with
- _____ Moving the conversation off topic
- _____ Focusing on what I am going to say to the extent that I don't hear/listen closely to my classmates' contributions
- _____ Others:

Time for a group conversation:

1. Share with the group your group work style and challenges?
2. How does your group work style meld with the group work style of the other members? What similarities and differences exist?
3. What group guidelines could you develop in order for your group to work together productively given your styles and challenges?

On the white board, write out 2-4 ground rules or expectations for your group.

One tool for effectively communicating expectations and for including everyone on the team is to utilize the supportive structures of group roles. Here's how they can be beneficial:

- Participants are more likely to stay on task and pay closer attention to the task at hand when their roles in the collaboration are clear and distinct.
- Students are less likely to feel left out or unengaged when they have a particular duty that they are responsible for completing. Along the same lines, assigning group roles reduces the likelihood of one individual completing the task for the whole group, or "taking over," to the detriment of others' learning.
- Group members are more likely to hold each other accountable for not completing work if a particular task is assigned to them.
- Group roles allow students to strengthen their communicative skills, especially in areas that they are less confident in volunteering for.

- Group roles can help disrupt stereotypical and gendered role assignments, which can be common in group learning.

Suggested roles to use in CHEM 230:

Conversation starter...gets the group moving

Includer...makes sure everyone is included

Scribe...writes on whiteboard

Photographer...takes a picture and posts it

Note diver...looks up information from the notes

Data guru...calculator king or queen

Catch box responder

Attention getter....of Dr. Gottfried or a GSI

Questioner...plays devil's advocate

Double checker...fact and calculation checks

Summarizer...sums up discussion points

On the white board, make a list of your groups roles that you will rotate through.

Check in: Have you and your group achieved the following outcomes?

- 1) The group has identified styles and potential challenges
- 2) The group has identified important ground rules
- 3) The group has identified how you will use roles

Assessment

At the end of your time with this group, you will be asked to answer the following questions with: Yes or No.

Self-evaluation:

- 1) I attended the TBL meetings and came prepared having done the pre-TBL work.
- 2) I followed our ground rules and communicated respectfully.
- 3) I participated fully in our work, and took my turn at the group roles.

For each group member:

- 4) The first group member was present at TBL activities.
- 5) The first group member came prepared for class.

6) The first group member followed our ground rules and communicated respectfully.

7) The first group member took his/her/their turn in the group roles.

Optional: Any compliments or constructive (helpful) feedback for your first group member. (He or she will receive your feedback.)

When challenges arise...they do and they will...it is only normal...use them opportunities for growth

- 1) **Do:** Take responsibility for your own actions
(Use statements like “I feel...,” “I am seeing...”)
Don’t: Assume that someone else is the problem

- 2) **Do:** Discuss the problem as a team. (Think about how you would feel.)
Don’t: Leave someone out of the discussion or talk about them behind their back.

- 3) **Do:** Focus on the behavior of concern and how it affects you.
(Separate the behavior from the worth of the person.)
Don’t: Equate a behavior with the value of the person.

- 4) **Do:** Use constructive, formative, and respectful language
Don’t: Use language that is derogatory or hurtful

Team Myth Busting

Myth #1: One person on the team should do all of the leading
Leadership is best distributed across group members, drawing on all of the strengths of all of the group members. A single leader can put too much power into the hands of a single person

Myth #2: Since no one disagrees, we all agree.
When everyone keeps their disagreement secret and no one voices their true opinion, the group can end up going down a path that no one agrees with. Make sure that all members state their true positions (including yourself!) Silence could be standing in for disagreement.

Myth #3: If you don’t participate, that’s your problem.
If one person does not participate, it is the entire team’s problem. For the team get the most out of their work, they must draw on the ideas and skills of all of its members. Refrain from making assumptions about why one teammate is not participating. Rather, encourage their participation by asking for their input. Identify and address any barriers to their participation.