

## On Group Work: What Last Year's Students Had to Say to You.

### 1. General advice

In the first meetings break the ice by complimenting the group, start building group pride from day 1--it was definitely the basis of our success. Trust your group members, believe it or not, they're as intelligent as you. Do not assume your work is the best. Expect to have less general responsibilities, but a lot of responsibility to your group.

My advice for next year's groups would be to know each other first before getting down to business. This could be so simple as going out for a few beers at the keg. Make sure you have a consistent schedule, and constant communication (dialogue) throughout the quarter. Keep team morale up by taking breaks during meetings, or going out after a major opinion is written.

Be social, make the effort even if it seems forced at first, because by the end of the quarter you really will be friends.

Group work is hard. You have to adjust to it. Don't be afraid to trust the people in your group. One person cannot do everything. Avoid total agreement: it makes for bad opinions. Work hard. Work together. Accept and trust the people in your group.

Flexibility, sacrifice, compromise, tolerance.

Food is key to success.

Ask questions, even if you think your questions are dumb. Help each other and ask for help if you need it.

Be sure to communicate clearly. Get to know each other beforehand, so you feel comfortable working with one another. Avoid being unflexible. Try to be considerate of other group members and their personal commitments.

Problems with group should be decided early on because it could be a huge issue. This course revolves around group work. I personally thought my group was great, but I could see it being an issue if some members didn't contribute. The more work you can do as a group, the better. That way you avoid assigning people things, and worrying about the product.

Be patient--things get done very slowly in groups; give yourself lots of time for each project and don't expect any question to be easy (like where to meet?--that can take 10 minutes). Be prepared to lose sometimes--it's rare that everyone will agree with anything. Work hard--everyone else will be really mad if you don't do more than your share; you'll need them to help you out at some point.

Group work is never easy. Expect a variety of personalities. Be flexible. Be open and always express your opinions and challenge others. That's how you'll be shot down, but it is also how you will learn. Value others' opinions.

Meet early & often. Pay attention to covenant and strengths & weaknesses. Avoid relying on one person labelled as "leader"--their lives are just as unpredictable as everyone else's. Learn to work with entire group.

Expect to have to work harder than you would alone. Group work takes effort to get along, to recognizing opposing viewpoints and to organize all those people. Come to

**class!** People who never come just don't have a clue, and that means less to contribute to the group. Set dates for specific tasks to be completed and accomplish them. Avoid last-minute group work.

Deal with noncontribution problems early on. There's no reason for others to pull your weight. Also try to deal with discrepancies in quality of work.

Work together--it is important for learning! If you have uneven distribution and feel upset don't worry, you get out what you put out--remember the final is huge.

## 2. Meetings

Allow everyone to miss a meeting or two, you'll be glad when they let you do the same.

Meet regularly but also be flexible with meeting times.

Set a weekly time to meet. Divide work evenly. Demand the most of your fellow members. Keep up on reading. Have fun. Realize that this is one of the only classes you'll take in which you have such an opportunity to learn from your fellow students. Take advantage of it! Have fun. This is how college should be.

I personally had a wonderful group to work with. We always came prepared to discuss and had even enjoyable meetings. My advice is to come prepared to group meetings so you can contribute to discussions. Meet regularly, in a regular spot. Also--don't be afraid to voice any argument, because everything you say, whether or not it directly relates, may bring up a different point, or force others to strengthen their own arguments.

Set group meeting time and stick to it.

Make time for each other, and commit to staying for entire meeting. Get used to each other. Go to meetings prepared. Challenge each others. Address issues with members, don't ignore (i.e. tardiness, lack of participation, apathy, etc.)

Find a two hour slot you're all available every week, and commit yourselves to making the most of that time together.

Make sure you always do your part and do the reading, otherwise you are no help to the group. Schedule conflicts: understand they exist and try to work around them. It becomes frustrating, but everyone is busy.

Start early on work. Set regular group meeting times. Avoid splitting the reading if your group never reviews them together.

Set regular meeting times if possible for every week. Get started on assignments early. Use the instructor, she's a good resource. Find your "voice" by talking, discussing and arguing a lot. Respect every member of your group, even those who are quiet and reserved, they probably have lots to say.

Make a standard meeting time to meet every week. Utilize email during the week: it helps to communicate! Talk about problems in the group when they occur, so they don't escalate.

### 3. Division of labor

Avoid dividing tasks so rigidly you don't get to collaborate.

We all felt that we had a great group: smart, motivated, fun, and considerate. Plus we all always did our briefs, so as a result we stopped making two people do each one. The downside was that when one member (me) had computer troubles it became a crisis!

To next year's groups: **READ THIS!** You need not re-invent the wheel with learning how the groups work best. The best way to break up the briefs is to have each brief covered by two people. This way you never (well, maybe sometimes) miss a major point, and you'll always have them for the tests and assignments.

Be sure and read up for the debates. Once you've read, you shouldn't be afraid to talk. You'll sound smart. Try to share the debating responsibility. It's too good a learning experience to just keep for yourself.

The best thing for them to do is debate in the group and keep notes of their debates to use those arguments later.

Refuse to take all the responsibilities. No work is better than a work made by two. It could give a good lesson to everyone.

Specific thing: writing papers together takes more time, but it is really good. Just make sure to allow time for the individuals to take home the final product, look it over themselves and then re-meet to quickly address defects in style or wording.

Divide up briefs. Always make sure 2 people do every brief. Make sure to define your group's free speech value early and often.

Division of work is beneficial in some instances, but not always the answer. Writing/editing things together may take a while but it may be better overall.

Make sure you argue out all sides of the opinions before you write them.

Always work together on everything. I mean even if it is something individual, talk it over first. There is so much information, that you can't possibly have thought of everything. And even if you are superman and did, it can't hurt to brainstorm. Avoid individual thinking. A lot. Bounce ideas off each other.

Sometimes it's helpful to have a few people do more work one week and less the next, so that at some point everyone gets a breather.

Try arguing for something that you don't necessarily agree with--makes you more aware of different techniques of argumentation.

Try to hear everyone out. Don't try to dominate and impose your opinions on others. TOLERATE! It's a group-based class, therefore you can't be individual all the time. Prepare for debate in advance--a lot of interesting material.

Groups should learn quickly how to work together rather than relying on each other to complete tasks and make decisions. The groups should realize that they are not just mechanisms for the division of labor.