

Tips for Guiding Successful Group Work

To have productive and enriching group-work often takes some effort to orchestrate. Assigning roles in the group or establishing ground rules can often help. These ideas and the other tips below may help your classroom group work go smoothly.

Have Students Complete These Tasks at the Beginning of Group Work

- Exchange names and if necessary contact details.
- Be clear as to the assignment and project deadline date.
- List all tasks needed to complete assignment and be as specific as possible.
- Agree on who will accomplish each task and assign specific deadlines for tasks.
- Discuss important items first.

Encourage Students to Create an Environment of Respect within Groups

- Each group member should be given the opportunity to contribute.
- People come from differing backgrounds and experiences. Differing points of view are important and should be listened to and considered in a respectful manner.
- Everyone has different learning and working styles. Some may begin discussing right away while others may hold back to process information first.
- Do not interrupt others. Offer only tactful, constructive comments.
- Keep the discussion to the point. Avoid getting off on other subjects. If this happens have one person charged with getting the group back on track.

Consider Having Students Assign Roles for Group Members

- Assigning roles to group members may help the group work more efficiently.
- Roles to consider are chairperson, note-taker/recorder, timekeeper, presenter, etc.

If Discussions Are Being Dominated by a Few Individuals

- Set discussion ground rules. Examples are: no one speaking for more than three or four minutes; no interrupting; no critical comments about people.
- Suggest students elect one person to direct the discussion.
- Thank the person dominating the discussion and ask if anyone wishes to speak.

If Students Are Nervous About Speaking in a Group

- Ask them to jot down the point they would like to make before speaking.
- Suggest they begin by asking for an example from a classmate or agreeing with what someone said.
- Recommend taking a deep breath before speaking.
- Urge them to speak clearly.

Remind Students to...

- Listen carefully to what others have to say so they don't miss a good idea or thought.
- Speak clearly.
- Highlight any good ideas and ask for more details.

References

Cooperative learning: Students working in small groups (1999). Speaking of Teaching: Stanford University Newsletter on Teaching, 10 (2).
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