

GROUP ASSIGNMENTS: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR GROUP PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Group assignments are crucial in university education, fostering essential skills like teamwork, communication, and problem solving. The key to a successful group project is proactive planning, open communication, and mutual respect. Whether you're selecting your own group or being assigned members by a professor, this guide will help you navigate the process effectively from setup to troubleshooting.

SETTING UP YOUR GROUP AT THE FIRST MEETING:

1. Schedule Early:

- **Initiate Contact:** Reach out to all group members as soon as possible
- **Availability:** Use a scheduling tool like Doodle or Google Calendar to find a common meeting time.
- **Book rooms:** Once you have decided on meeting dates, you can book study rooms at either the Webster or Vanier Libraries
<https://concordiauniversity.libcal.com/>

2. Set Objectives:

Clarify Goals:

- Discuss the assignment's objectives and ensure everyone has a clear understanding.
- Focus on the due date and aim to have the project ready beforehand.
- Try to estimate the number of hours the project may take.

3. Roles and Responsibilities:

Identify Strengths:

- Conduct a quick assessment of each member's strengths and interests and engagement level. Negotiate the acceptable grade range for this project. The best way to keep everyone engaged through the process is to make sure everyone has a clear role.

Assign Roles:

- **Leader/Coordinator:** Ensures the project stays on track and deadlines are met.
- **Researcher(s):** Gathers and organizes information.
- **Writer(s):** Drafts and compiles the written components. Review the assignment instructions as your professor may want each group member to contribute to the writing/presenting of the information. You can make an



appointment with a Writing Assistant for help at any stage of the writing process; for group work, you can have the appointment alone to work on your own contribution or meet with some or all of the group members.

<https://www.concordia.ca/students/success/learning-support/writing-assistance.html>

- Editor: Reviews and refines the content.
- Presenter(s): Prepares and delivers the presentation. Again, this may be outlined in the project assignment.
- Tech Support: Manages any technical aspects, such as creating slides or videos.

4. Communication Tools:

Choose Platforms:

- Messaging: WhatsApp, Slack, or GroupMe for quick updates.
- Video Calls: Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet for virtual meetings.
- Document Sharing: Google Drive or OneDrive for collaborative work.

5. Set Guidelines:

- Response Time: Agree on expected response times for messages (e.g., within 24 hours).
- Meeting Protocols: Establish how meetings will be conducted (e.g., use of agendas, rotating facilitators).

6. Planning and Scheduling:

Create a Timeline:

- Break Down Tasks: Divide the project into smaller tasks with specific deadlines.
- Gantt Chart: Use tools like Trello or Asana to create a visual timeline.

EFFECTIVE MEETINGS:

1. Agenda:

- Preparation: Share the agenda at least a day before the meeting.
- Topics: Include task updates, upcoming deadlines, and any issues.

2. Minutes:

- Documentation: Assign someone to take detailed notes during each meeting.
- Distribution: Send minutes to all members shortly after the meeting.

3. Action Items:

- Clarity: Clearly define next steps and who is responsible for each task.
- Deadlines: Set clear deadlines for action items.

COLLABORATIVE WORK OUTSIDE OF MEETINGS:

1. Shared Documents:

- Realtime Collaboration: Use Google Docs/Sheets for simultaneous editing.
- Version Control: Keep track of changes and maintain a backup.

2. Regular Updates:

- Status Reports: Use shared documents or group chats for regular progress updates.
- Problem Solving: Discuss any challenges and seek collective solutions.

TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON ISSUES:

1. Uneven Work Distribution:

- Early Detection: Monitor Contributions: Keep track of individual contributions to identify any imbalances early.
- Open Discussion: Address the issue openly and constructively.

2. Reassign Tasks:

- Flexibility: Be willing to reassign tasks to ensure a fair distribution of work.
- Support: Offer support to members who are struggling with their tasks.

3. Communication Breakdowns:

Clarify Expectations:

- Reiterate Plan: Remind everyone of the agreed upon communication guidelines.
- Adjust Methods: If necessary, adjust communication methods to suit everyone's preferences.

4. Missed Deadlines:

Assess Impact:

- Evaluate: Determine how a missed deadline affects the overall project.
- Prioritize: Focus on critical tasks to mitigate the impact.

Replan:

- Adjust Timeline: Update the project timeline to accommodate delays.
- Redistribute Work: Reassign tasks if necessary to meet new deadlines.

5. Lack of Engagement:

Check in Individually:

- Personal Outreach: The group leader should reach out to disengaged members to understand their challenges.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION:

1. Open Communication:

- Environment: Foster a respectful and open environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing concerns.
- Active Listening: Practice active listening to understand all viewpoints.

2. Mediation:

- Third party Help: In serious conflicts, consider involving a neutral third party (e.g., a professor, TA or Learning Strategist:
<https://www.concordia.ca/students/success/learning-support/specialists.html>).

FINALIZING AND SUBMITTING/PRESENTING THE ASSIGNMENT:

1. Doublecheck Requirements:

- Guidelines: Reread all of the instructions to ensure the project meets all submission requirements and guidelines.
- Formatting: Check formatting and citation styles.

2. Proofread the Written Project and any Text on PowerPoint Slides:

- Thorough Check: Review the entire project for grammatical errors, coherence, and completeness. The written document must have a sense of flow even if different parts were written by different group members.
- Tools: Use tools like Grammarly for assistance; Concordia University Libraries have access to Grammarly on many of their computers. Ask a librarian for help.
- Peer Review: Share the draft with all group members for feedback.
- Incorporate: Incorporate feedback and make necessary revisions.

3. Practice Runs for Presentations:

- Rehearsal: Conduct multiple practice sessions.
- Feedback: Record the practice runs and review them for improvement.

4. Backup Plans:

- Technical Issues: Have backups of all materials (e.g., slides, videos) on multiple devices.
- Plan B: Be prepared with an alternative plan in case of technical failures.

SUBMISSION:

Submit Early:

- Avoid Last minute Issues: Submit the project well before the deadline to avoid technical issues.