



# GROUP WORK

## STUDENT HANDBOOK

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GEOFF PLIMMER, VICKY MABIN, KAREN COMMONS,  
XIAODAN GAO, VAL LINDSAY, CHARLES CAMPBELL,  
KATY WILSON, CALEB AVELING





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# 1

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## GROUP WORK RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Group assignments teach the skills you'll need in order to do well in the workplace. Almost all jobs require interaction with others, the ability to work in a team, and the ability to achieve a result. The ability to be a team player is consistently one of the top ten graduate attributes employers want. Doing well in group projects at university could help you get the job you want!

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*Group projects can be challenging, but many of these difficulties can be overcome using the resources in this guide.*

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## Managing time

This section contains some tips for time management that will help you study efficiently and avoid spending too much time on the group assignment. There is also a link to a quiz that will help you learn more about your time management skills, what you do well, and what you could improve on.

## Managing meetings

Having an agenda for group meetings can make them faster and more productive. This guide includes tips for making meeting agendas work; it gives a sample meeting agenda as well as a template for taking minutes.

## Managing workload

Having a timeline for your assignment (that you stick to) means that you don't have to worry about last-minute delays. It's also a good way to make sure that everything is on track, everyone in your group knows what they're doing, and that if anything unexpected happens you have time to fix it. This section includes a guide for creating a timeline, as well as a sample timeline for different stages of an assignment.

## Creating group rules

Group rules are a good way to ensure that everyone in your group has the same expectations of each other. This will avoid frustration and misunderstandings during the project. These rules need to be agreed on by all group members at the start of a project, ideally in the first meeting.





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# MANAGING TIME

Do you feel like group projects take up too much of your time? Good time management skills are very useful for getting things done efficiently so that you still have time for yourself -- try this [quiz to test your time management skills](#).



## 1. Have a to-do list

- Prioritise it from most to least important.
- Work through by completing the most important task before you move on to the next one; i.e. don't leave things half-finished.
- Consider that tasks requiring lots of feedback from other group members will need to be done sooner (and are thus more important).
- Set aside time to work regularly on the to-do list (rather than just doing it when you have time).

## 2. Set clear goals

- Be specific about each goal, for example, finish 1000 words for the discussion section of the report.
- Set a deadline of when you want each goal to be finished. If it's a large goal, then set mid-point deadlines, for example, finish 300 words by Tuesday, 600 by Thursday, and 1000 by next Monday.

Note: Setting clear goals is also important for meetings; here are some tips for efficient ways to run meetings.

## 3. Don't procrastinate

- Set mid-point deadlines with your group and use them to hold each other accountable.
- Break down tasks into small parts so that you don't have to do a lot at once.
- Reward yourself if you finish a part on time/early, for example, go out with friends, have a chocolate bar.



## 4. Focus when you study

- It's best to focus for 50-90 minutes at a time. Less than 50 minutes doesn't give you time to focus or be effective, and after 90 minutes (or less depending on the person) your brain gets tired and it's good to have a break.
- Don't check emails or Facebook more often than every hour. You not only lose the time you spent checking them, but also the time it takes you to refocus on what you were doing before.
- Study somewhere you will not be interrupted. This might be your flat, the library, the city library, or another place with minimal distractions.





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# MANAGING MEETINGS

Meetings can be one of the most time-consuming aspects of group assignments, but they're an important part of working as a group. If you want to know how to have an effective meeting in 1–2 hours, how to get the most from a meeting and how to make sure you finish on time then read on.



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*All meetings should have agendas. Meeting agendas ensure that you know what you're going to talk about and you know how long the meeting will be so you don't waste your time.*

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## Tips for making a meeting agenda work:

- Group members should try and arrive about five minutes before the meeting is due to start, so that you can make sure you have a room and are organised to start on time.
- Allow enough time for each point. If something needs to be discussed, then leave more time than you think you'll need. The same goes for giving feedback. These items can go on for a while, and if they're not done thoroughly, then you'll have to do them again later.
- Set a start and finish time to the meeting, and stick to those. This may mean reducing discussion time (although if you follow the point above you shouldn't have to). Meetings that run over time can get sloppy -- any more than two hours for a meeting usually does not achieve anything new. You'll just keep discussing the same points for longer. If you get through the agenda faster than you expected, then finish early and enjoy the extra time.
- Have a timekeeper and someone to take minutes for each meeting (these people can stay the same or rotate each meeting). The timekeeper should make sure that you don't go over time on agenda items, and the minute-taker should keep a record of who came, what was discussed, and the outcomes and action points.

## Sample meeting agenda:

1. Check-in (10-20 Minutes)
  - Updates from everyone since the last meeting: what they've been doing and their progress.
  - This can take quite a while if group members have something to discuss relating to what they've been doing, for example, they might want input on an idea, have an idea to share and get feedback on, or have something that might help another group member.

- Go over the action points from the last meeting and check that they've all been done. If any haven't, then discuss why not and see what you can change to make sure that it doesn't happen again (For example, if there wasn't enough time to do the action point, reschedule it or allocate less work).

## 2. Discussion Points (5-20 Minutes Each)

- Discussion of each part of the project that you are currently working on. This is to get input and feedback from the whole group.
- It's a good idea to have a 'car park' -- a place where you can write down other ideas or discussion points which aren't relevant to the current topic so that you can come back to them later.
- These should be sent to the group before the meeting if possible, with a chance for everyone to contribute. An email thread is a good way of doing this, or a Google document.

## 3. Finish With A List Of Action Steps For Everyone To Complete Before The Next Meeting.

- These can be built up during the meeting after each discussion point.
- Review these at the end of the meeting as a further reminder and ensure that everyone is clear on their responsibilities.
- After the meeting the minute taker should email a copy of the minutes to all the group members. This ensures that everyone is clear about what they're doing, and that any group members who failed to attend know what is happening.



This is a template of a meeting agenda, with space for minutes included. The examples included are to show how it could be filled out (download a [blank template for developing your agenda](#)).

AGENDA ITEM/ TIME	DESCRIPTION	DISCUSSION	ACTION POINTS
Action points 10 minutes.	Review from last meeting.	Everyone has completed the research stage. Bob found extra resources for Sarah.	Bob: Send link to resources to Sarah.
Research discussion 15 minutes.	Decide what is relevant to our project.	We'll focus on theory X and Y, as well as current industry statistics.	None.
Research completion 15 minutes.	How are we going to present the research?	We'll try and put it into a 2-page document, summarising the main points.	Sarah: Draft the summary and send it out a day before the next meeting.
Stage 2, 30 minutes.	How should we do it?	Split the work: two people analyse each market while one finishes off Stage 1 summary. 1–2 page analysis draft by next meeting to get an idea of the next step.	Mohamed and Em: Analyse Indonesian market. Bob and Sapna: Analyse NZ market.
Wrap-up 5 minutes.	Finalise action points, agree on next meeting time.	None.	None.

This meeting managed to:

- 1.review what the group had done so far
- 2.discuss the current situation and decide on the next steps
- 3.decide who is doing what
- 4.set clear action points so that everyone knows what they're doing by when

And it was all within the space of 1 hour 15 minutes! In the next meeting the group would allocate time to discussing the market analyses, giving feedback, and deciding whether more work was needed or if the group could move on to the next stage.

Notice that the group members were working to their strengths -- Sarah might be good at summarising and have good written English, while the group members doing market analyses might know a bit about the market they will be analysing. Speaking other languages is a particular bonus -- it is much easier to analyse the Indonesian market if you can understand local publications rather than relying on international information in English.





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# MANAGING WORKLOAD

Procrastination can be a big issue for students, but it is far worse when multiplied by the number of people in your group. Leaving things to the last minute affects your whole group, so you need to start out with an idea of what needs to be done by when.



Below are some tips for planning an assignment timeline, and ways to ensure that if something goes wrong you have enough time to deal with it.

- **Include buffer time in each assignment.** This should be roughly 25% of the total time you have for the assignment, and is time you set aside 'just in case'. It can be used if someone in your group can't finish something on time, if there is a problem with the internet, if you realise that one part of the assignment will take longer than expected, and also to allow for group discussions and dynamics. Such discussions are necessary but can take up a lot of time. Buffer time is great for making sure that things are done on time, and that a last-minute printing issue doesn't make your whole group fail.
- **Plan your assignment timeline from the start, rather than the finish.** This means that if it will take you a week to do each stage of an assignment and you have three stages, aim to finish in three weeks. Don't assume that you can start 3 weeks before the assignment is due -- if you do that you're asking for last-minute stress and things will go wrong. Keep in mind that it's a lot harder to do everything last minute for a group assignment, so you will need extra time to discuss the assignment and put it together.
- **Have mini-deadlines for each stage of the assignment.** It's a good idea to set actions each meeting to be done before the next meeting -- that way you're always making progress, and each group member is accountable for doing something regularly so they can't leave it to the last minute. This way if someone doesn't finish their part the rest of the group has advance warning and can do something about it, rather than finding out the day before the assignment is due.
- **Be realistic with timing.** Everyone in your group has a life outside this assignment, and might have 3 other assignments due around the same time. You need to take this into account when planning your timeline. If someone has a lot due in week 8, then they could do a lot in the early stages of the assignment around week 5. If you aren't going to do any work during the mid-trimester break, then it's better to let your group know early and plan for it.



## Assignment timeline guide

Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group selection. Get to know your group, talk about your working styles and strengths related to the assignment.</li> <li>• Organise your first meeting.</li> </ul>
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have your first meeting. Decide how you want to organise the assignment (who will do what, how often you want to meet, how you want to work together).</li> <li>• If it will be a long assignment (4+ weeks), it's good to set a regular meeting time each week.</li> <li>• Set a timeline for when you want to complete each part. It's good to include buffer time of 25% of the total assignment time (e.g. for an 8-week assignment include 2 weeks buffer; for a 2 week assignment include 4 days buffer). This buffer time can be used if something unexpected happens, or if things take longer than you expected. It is always good to have extra time at the end as well to ensure the assignment is done well.</li> </ul>
Main assignment time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have regular meetings to discuss parts of the assignment and ensure that you're on track. Track yourself against the timeline you set and keep a record of any buffer time that you use up.</li> </ul>
Final week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that you finish everything at least 2 days before the assignment is due so that you can meet as a group and finalise everything. This is particularly important for presentations. It's good to have at least one test presentation to check the timing, and to ensure you don't repeat each other or miss parts out.</li> </ul>

# Sample assignment timeline (8-week assignment)

## First assignment timeline (decided in week 1)

Week 1	Weeks 2, 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Weeks 7, 8
Topic chosen, group rules finalised	Stage 1 of assignment done	Stage 2 of assignment done	Stage 3 of assignment done	Finalise everything	Buffer time

## Updated assignment timeline (updated in week 4)

The topic and guidelines took 1.5 weeks to finalise and stage 2 took 1.5 weeks.

Weeks 1, 2	Weeks 2, 3, 4	Weeks 4, 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Topic chosen, group rules finalised	Stage 1 of assignment done	Stage 2 of assignment done	Stage 3 of assignment done	Finalise everything	Buffer time

## Final assignment timeline (what actually happened)

Stage 3 of the assignment also ran late, so the buffer time was used up on stage 3 and formatting the final assignment.

Weeks 1, 2	Weeks 2, 3, 4	Weeks 4, 5	Weeks 6, 7	Weeks 7, 8
Topic chosen, group guidelines finalised	Stage 1 of assignment done	Stage 2 of assignment done	Stage 3 of assignment done	Finalise everything





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## 5

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# CREATING GROUP RULES

So you've been assigned to a group to do an assignment together, and you probably don't know most, if any, of the people in your group. Chances are that most people in your group will want different things, expect to put in different amounts of effort, and work differently to you. This can cause major issues if you don't prepare, so it's worth putting in time at the start of the assignment to set some rules.



Group rules are a good way to ensure that everyone in your group has the same expectations of each other. This will avoid frustration and misunderstandings during the project. These rules need to be agreed on by all group members at the start of a project, ideally in the first meeting.

The most important thing with setting group rules is that everyone is honest about what they want, expect, and can contribute. Group members also need to be prepared to hold each other to the rules, and to implement the consequences if someone breaks them.

## Things to include in your rules:

Consider	Example
Grade your group is aiming for	A, or just a pass
Time spent in group meetings	2 hours per week
Meeting behaviour	Show up 5 minutes early, let everyone know 2 days in advance if you can't make it.
Amount of work done individually	Research portion, rough drafts of each part
Timeline	Everything drafted by week 5.
Communication between meetings	Email reply within 3 days, text reply within 1 day
Consequence for being late for meetings	Bring a snack for everyone for the next meeting
Consequence for not finishing an individual task on time/to a high enough standard	Group will let the marker know who is responsible for that part and ask them to mark accordingly
Consequence for not finishing an individual task/not contributing fairly	Grade reduced by 5% of final group mark (if considered fair by lecturer)
Check group wiki and/or email daily	

The list above is a template and your group will probably want to add things (here is a **blank template** for creating your rules). You should think of consequences that you can all agree on.

Once your group has agreed on its rules, print out a hard copy and sign it. That way you are all committing to the rules, and you can use the agreed consequences to reinforce the guidelines and sort out most issues within the group.