

 **ONLINE COLLABORATION**

Successful online collaboration is essential for working efficiently and completing tasks. There are three main areas of concern, 1) working in groups, 2) managing online meetings, and 3) using online tools.

**Overview**

**1.** Agree on a group leader to monitor communications, set tasks and schedules, and to track progress.

**2.** Agree on a preferred method of communication (email, instant messenger, conference calls and so on).

**3.** Agree on distribution of tasks and assign roles to group members.

**4.** Agree on final deadlines, and set progressive subtask deadlines.

**5.** Agree on group behaviour rules. For example, agree on an action plan if a group member misses a meeting, or a deadline, or fails to complete a subtask by an agreed time (such as contacting the lecturer or tutor, or removing the group member).

**1) Working in Groups**

* Research a common groupwork theory such as [Tuckman’s 5 Stages of Team Development](https://toggl.com/stages-of-team-development/)
* Get to know each other’s personalities and interests, this will make your team more effective.
* Define roles for each person in the group. Leader, notetaker, timekeeper, summarizer, editor and so on.
* Set agreed meeting rules from the start. What happens if someone misses a meeting or doesn’t complete a task?
* Communicate effectively: if you disagree say so. Be constructive and explain the issue which you are concerned about, but do not focus on personal differences. If someone disagrees with you, consider their reasons, and if you aren’t sure ask them to explain why.
* Allow space for all members (including the introverts) to talk, and don’t allow any one person to dominate.
* Keep records of what was said in each meeting, and an agreed list of ACTIONS arising from each meeting.
* At the end of each meeting reach consensus on the ACTIONS list and get agreement from each assigned group member.
* Review the progress on the ACTIONS list (what must be completed in what order, by when, and by whom) at the beginning of every meeting.
* Assign a backup person to each ACTION point in case someone needs help, becomes ill, or withdraws from the group.
* Be reliable. Stick to the agreed plan and do what you said you would do. If one person lets the team down all will suffer. If you can’t do something, don’t agree to it in the meeting. Be honest and open with your ability and willingness to contribute.

**2) Managing Online Meetings**

* Gather 3 different forms of contact for each team member (email, skype, messenger etc.) and distribute to all team members to ensure you don’t lose contact.
* Agree on meeting tool such as Collaborate, Skype, Zoom, and so on. Agree on weekly or twice weekly meeting times for the whole semester in the very first meeting.
* Schedule extra meetings in the week leading up to submission of a group task (perhaps one three days before and another the day before).
* Commit to being at the online meeting each time. Assign a group member to take notes and monitor attendance.
* Assign an online meeting manager (usually the group leader) who can keep everyone on topic, monitor the relevance of the discussion, and keep an eye on the time.
* Agree on a form of turn taking and mute your microphone when you are not speaking to allow people to speak easily and without distractions.

**3) Using Online Tools**

* Agree on a primary method of document sharing. You might use Dropbox, Google Docs, or OneDrive. Don’t keep multiple individual copies of documents or you will have difficulty with different version edits creating confusion about what has or hasn’t been done.
* Make use of free communication and project management tools like [Slack,](https://slack.com/) [Clickup](https://clickup.com/), or [Trello](https://trello.com/signup).
* Make use of free online collaboration tools like [mindmaps](https://bubbl.us/) or use an [online whiteboard](http://www.twiddla.com/).
* Agree on a primary and reliable video communication tool like [Skype](https://www.skype.com/) or [Zoom](https://zoom.us/) (40 minutes for free each meeting)