Meeting strategies for group work

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Working in groups is quite different than working individually. One of the main reasons why students find it difficult is that they were not trained to perform effectively in a team setting. An instructor can help by teaching organizational, personal, and discussion skills that will help students manage group dynamics and have a positive teamwork experience. Meetings are key events during group work, and there are several techniques for running effective meetings.

Planning and conducting a meeting

Steps that should be taken before a meeting happens:

Plan the meeting carefully: who, what, when, where, why, and how many
Prepare and send out an agenda, identifying issues to be discussed
Indicate for each topic whether it is intended merely to inform (announcements), to discuss or whether an (important) decision is to be taken
Set up meeting room send out background information about members

Steps that should be taken during a meeting:

Start on time
Make introductions of group members
Clearly define roles
Review, revise, and order the agenda
Set clear time limits
Review action items from previous meeting
focus on one issue at a time

Steps that should be taken at the end of and after a meeting:

Record final decisions or actions to be taken
Assign tasks to group members
Set deadlines for the tasks
Set the date and place of the next meeting and develop a preliminary agenda
Evaluate the meeting, get feedback from members
Close the meeting positively
Clean up the room
Prepare the group memo, distribute to members and others who need to know

Group roles

Different roles group members may play during a meeting (*also see document maximizing group performance for more information on these roles***):**
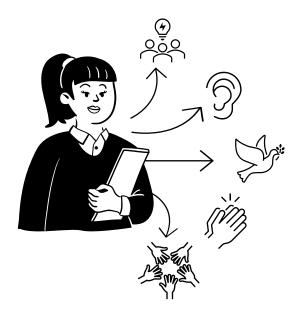
→ Facilitator/leader
→ Note-taker
→ Timekeeper
→ Mediator/Arbiter: someone who helps with group climate (conflict resolution)
→ Progess chaser/Supervisor: someone who monitors progress
→ Devil's advocate: someone who helps with fair decision making
→ Expert
→ Presenter

Important tasks that should be performed by the facilitator of a meeting:

→ Encouraging participation
→ Summarizing input
→ Discouraging domination
→ Encouraging decision making
→ Keeping group focused
→ Making final decisions, if necessary
→ Clarifying ideas
→ Delegating roles and tasks
→ Providing feedback
→ Keeping the peace
→ Energizing group members

Skills that students need to develop to promote effective group work:

→ Active and tolerant listening
→ Communication skills
→ Flexibility
→ Accountability
→ Respect for others' contributions
→ Helping others to master content
→ Participation

→ Giving and receiving constructive feedback
→ Patience
→ Managing disagreements
→ Motivation
→ Keeping deadlines

Activities and tools that can be used in a group meeting for:

Opening discussion
  → List available resources
  → State different perceptions of what the real problem
  → Brainstorm ideas - all ideas are encouraged and accepted
  → Legitimize - show an understanding of how others see the problem
  → Kickstart with an example
  → Propose some potential solutions
  → Ask each individual for a possible solution

Narrowing down the solutions
  → Evaluate solutions using some criteria
  → Make sure solutions address the issues
  → Rank ideas in order of priority
  → Categorize solutions
  → Separate solutions based on "pros/cons"
  → Look for redundant and overlapping ideas
  → Force field analysis (what ideas give support to solving the problem? which ones prevent reaching a solution?)

Closing the discussion
  → Majority voting
  → Consensus
  → Build-up/eliminate (add or subtract from different options to arrive at a new option that everyone can support)
  → Combine ideas (avoid either/or decisions)