# Faculty of Science Tutorial

# Group-work

# Aims:

1. To explain to students the various benefits of group-work.
2. To identify strategies for mitigating and managing problems and challenges associated with group-work.
3. To identify students’ own team-working strengths

**General points about group-work**

Discussions often highlight team-working skills as key outcomes, but there are a range of intellectual skills that group-work can develop which would be valuable to discuss. There is often much negative discourse surrounding group-work in the curriculum so a focus on the learning gains warrants more emphasis to help students understand why it is a valued part of the curriculum. Studies into group-work suggests that the key challenges are mitigated when there is a strong focus on agreeing ground-rules in advance and establishing task ownership and self-management of group work activity. These strategies can reduce the likelihood of problems emerging and empower students to deal with emerging issues as they arise, rather than simply deflect frustrations onto the course team. The tutorial focuses on valuing the positive outcomes associated with group-work and developing skills in self-managing team behaviours.

# Suggested Structure:

## 1. Positive outcomes from group-work

It is suggested that you commence the tutorial with a brief discussion of the importance of team-working in the discipline and industry, and why it is integrated into the curriculum, to emphasise the value that we place on the activity. It would then be valuable to ask students to identify the positive learning gains that arise out of team and collaborative activity. These could be categorised as:

* Social & Interpersonal skills (listening, respecting others’ contributions etc)
* Intellectual skills (allows research of broader / more complex data; practise debate skills; synthesising information; exposure to alternative perspectives).
* Managerial skills (organising meetings, task management, defining targets and focus)

## 2. Managing group-work: Ground-rules

Establishing ground-rules are seen as important for mitigating many of the challenges that emerge through group-work. If students agree to commit to ground-rules they have established they are more likely to be successful. Therefore a useful activity would be to practice defining ground-rules, asking students to identify sets of rules that they see as critical for a group to operate effectively. These might include:

* *Personal conduct:* Being polite and treat each other with respect; avoid dominating – encourage participation of other members;
* *Working practice:* Will there be a team-leader & roles, or rotation of leadership? Will students sign a group agreement to ‘commit’ to abide by ground-rules?, How will group communicate? Will they meet regularly? What will the group do if a member fails to communicate or participate? What will students do if ground-rules are broken?

## 3. Managing group-work: Conflict management & dealing with difficult situations

## Present students with a scenario that they are working as part of a group and then encounter a series of problems that emerge as the task progresses. Ask how they might deal with the following challenges (or how they could have been mitigated through ground-rules).

## Unfocused group: group drifts; too many ideas; lack targets; procrastinate

* *Domineering student:* student dictates proceedings; talks too much; doesn’t listen to views of others
* *Timid student:* student reluctant to participate, last to speak; struggles to convey ideas
* *Hostile student:* student overtly aggressive or dismissive of other team-members

Ask students to complete the Conflict Management styles questionnaire. This provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their own approach. The outcomes of this can be discussed in relation to the four scenarios above.

## Reflecting on personal team-working style (Belbin questionnaire)

## Explain how individuals each bring personal strengths to a group-working scenario, such as co-ordination skills, resource investigation skills and so on. The Belbin questionnaire helps individuals identify their individual strengths and weaknesses.

## Ask students to complete the Belbin Questionnaire. After completion of the questionnaire, suggested discussion could involve:

## Comparing personal team-working styles across group, looking for similar pairings

## How could this information be used positively in managing a group-work task?

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