

# Successful Group Work

Today, instructors in both undergraduate and graduate courses in many universities encourage students to work together in groups or teams. Because of the trend toward structured collaboration (also called collaborative learning) in academic institutions, it is important to master the skill of working effectively with others. In addition, these skills can be used in the workplace, where teamwork has become common.

When working as a team, take advantage of the fact that each member of a group brings different strengths to the group and few people are good at every task. For example, a group member might excel at doing one or more of the following:

- Organizing the team
- Interpreting assignments
- Doing computer research
- Facilitating group communication
- Encouraging classmates
- Mediating disagreements and building consensus
- Developing general concepts or procedures
- Contributing specific ideas or solutions
- Writing/typing the assignment
- Giving an oral presentation on the completed project

*The following are ingredients for successful group work.*

- Awareness of group process
- Established ground rules
- Clearly defined roles
- Clarity in team goals
- Well-defined decision process
- Balanced participation
- Clear communication

*The following are common problems that occur in group work activities.*

- Dominating participants
- Reluctant or shy participants
- Disorganization and confusion
- Digressions and irrelevance
- Rush to completion
- Arguments among participants
- Critical and judgmental attitudes

Now you will work in small groups to complete your first group work assignment. When your group is finished, you will give a report to the class on your results.

*Directions:* Working individually, read the following twenty items that describe possible ways in which the students could behave in a class in the United States.<sup>1</sup> According to your opinion, check *should* or *should not* for each item. Then compare your answers with the answers of the other members of your group. On the next page, list the items on which your group members disagreed. You have thirty minutes to complete this task.

*Should*      *Should Not*

- Smile or laugh in class
- Tell jokes in class
- Eat and drink in class
- Admit not knowing the answer to a question
- Agree with whatever the teacher says
- Disagree with the teacher during class
- Let the teacher go first when entering the classroom
- Stand when the teacher enters the classroom
- Correct the teacher when he or she makes mistakes
- Feel embarrassed about giving a wrong answer
- Volunteer to answer the teacher's questions
- Help other students answer questions in class
- Help other students answer test questions in class
- Try to write down everything the teacher says
- Ask questions to get the attention of the teacher
- Ask for permission to speak by raising hand
- Accept the authority of the teacher without question
- Ask the teacher to correct every student error
- Address the teacher by his or her first name
- Sit in the same seat during every class

1. David F. McCargar, "Teacher and Student Role Expectations: Cross-Cultural Differences and Implications," *Modern Language Journal* 77 (Summer 1993): 199.

*Items of Disagreement*