

# Group Work: Presentations

Many occupations rely upon teamwork and group participation as a core part of working life. People need to collaborate on activities to achieve the 'collective goals' of their organisation. Similarly, many activities in which you participate as a student will necessitate working closely with others.

## Forming a group

You may not have a say in who will be part of your group if your lecturer or tutor has assigned it. If you do need to establish one, there are no firm rules around it, so consider the following.

### Start early!

Form a group quickly in case you are dissatisfied with the topic or cannot reach agreement and need to join, or form, another group. Work with people with whom you are comfortable and trust to contribute, which does not necessarily mean selecting your 'best friends'. It is a bonus if you enjoy their company.

### Allocate roles & tasks

Random allocation of tasks and no collective planning can end in chaotic preparation, a breathless presentation, and a poor mark for everyone. Defining a group leader to allocate roles for each member ensures the workload is shared and equitable. Groups operate more cohesively if members feel that they are pursuing the same goal and making a contribution. Group work roles are flexible but could include:

- **Project manager:** A leader is responsible for allocating specific, relevant, manageable tasks. S/he also ensures that all members of the group have an opportunity to participate, keeps them on task and ensures respect within the group. The leader also does her/his share of the presentation preparation.
- **Recorder:** They keep records of the group's activities including the material contributed by each member. The recorder writes solutions to problems and takes a main role in preparing the accompanying written report to the lecturer. They also do her/his share of the presentation preparation.
- **Presenter:** The presenter takes a leading (but usually not sole) role in the final presentation, including the generation of discussion among the audience at the end of the presentation. The presenter also does her/his share of the presentation preparation.
- **Wildcard** (in groups of four): The wildcard acts as an assistant to the group leader, assumes the role of any member that may be missing, and does her/his share of the presentation preparation.

## Planning for your presentation

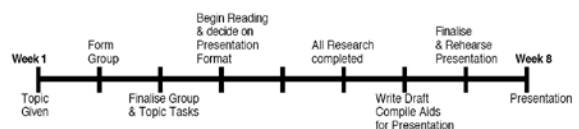
Once you have your presentation topic, start planning. The actual tasks involved will depend on the type of presentation or project, but they normally fall into one of four clearly defined stages, which are:

1. Specify the topic and determine a suitable approach
2. Gather information
3. Sort, select and organise the information to be included
4. Assemble the project/presentation materials into a product

### Set deadlines

Set a time frame for each stage with a definite start and completion time. This will help everyone keep the bigger picture in mind. Quarrels can arise when individuals fail to complete their tasks on time, so minimise this problem by agreeing upon realistic deadlines from the start. Regular meetings throughout the stages will help the group to feel connected. Once specific tasks are set, draw up a **timeline** to step you through them.

The illustration to the right is an example of an eight-week timeline.



### **Be responsible**

Be prepared to take responsibility for your tasks. Some groups have problems due to individuals not fulfilling their responsibilities, as it lets the whole group down. To address the potential for conflict about unequal contribution, you may be asked to complete a confidential evaluation on the others' contribution to group projects. Non-performing students are generally down-graded.

### **Address problems**

Team success takes effort, so if problems occur, try to solve them early and as a group. This puts the whole group in a better position. Compliments and encouragement will go a long way.

- Praise others for their efforts – everyone likes to feel recognised
- Don't exclude someone or take over their tasks, talk with them – they may need help
- Speak tactfully and calmly, and consider the other person's perspective
- Consult your lecturer if your efforts to resolve the situation have failed
- Look for solutions rather than to blame

### **Putting it together**

Once your group has identified what you hope to achieve through the presentation and compiled the information, it is time to assemble your presentation. Consider these aspects:

- how much time is allocated to the presentation
- what format will it take, e.g., PowerPoint, overheads, videos, photographs, transparencies, handouts
- what are the main points to cover, and how long will you spend on each
- what do you want your audience to remember
- how can you make the presentation interesting; and
- who is best suited to undertake particular tasks.

## **Delivering the goods**

This is where careful planning pays off. Speaking in front of an audience can be challenging, so good preparation will help you to feel confident and in control on the day. These tips may help your delivery:

- know the material thoroughly, and organise your notes
- rehearse your delivery for pace and style, and seek feedback on it from other group members
- speak confidently, even if you do not feel confident
- prepare the room (e.g., seating, overhead projectors, video, computer setups, data projectors etc.)
- use relaxation techniques if you feel nervous, such as deep, slow breathing to refocus you
- give your best during the first few minutes, as this is when the audience is most attentive.

### **Warning: PowerPoint**

PowerPoint can be both a joy and nightmare for the audience. The phrase 'less is more' is particularly relevant in preparing a PowerPoint presentation. Do *not* read from your PowerPoint or fill every screen with text, rather, present an outline of your material, and 'fill in' the detail verbally. Varying the content format, for example interspersing text with images, can add interest for your listeners.

### **Language says it all**

Attempt to connect with your audience using eye contact and smiling where appropriate. Hold your head up, speak naturally and with a strong voice. Avoid the "ums'n'ahs" and "ya knows" and speak clearly. This will help to slow down your speech, which in turn will give you an air of confidence. Try not to read from your notes – practise will help with this. Share your enthusiasm and your audience is more likely to reflect it. Using humour can also create a friendlier atmosphere.

## **Other helpsheets available**

- Group Work: Strategies
- Oral Presentations