



Teamwork

Why teamwork?

In most workplaces, as at university, you can expect to do at least some of your work in a group or team.

You may be thinking, “Ugh, teamwork! I’d rather have my leg cut off!” You are not alone. Many people have had an experience of group- or team-work that turned into a nightmare.

The bad news is that when you get to the workplace, working in a team may be unavoidable. The good news is that you and your team members can learn skills and processes to make teamwork more enjoyable and more productive. This guide can assist you.

What’s the difference between a group and a team? A **group** may be a **collection of people working independently**. For example, a group of modelling club members may meet regularly but each independently build their own model car. A **team works together to achieve a common objective**. For example, if the modelling club members worked together to produce a single large-scale model car for an exhibition (a shared goal), they would be working as a team.

Teamwork has both challenges and benefits. Two main benefits are:

1. The total range of skills and experience in a team is usually greater than for the average individual. This can mean the team can achieve better outcomes than an individual could achieve working alone.
2. Working in a well-functioning team can be enjoyable, and build the skills and experience of team members. You may even make long-term friends.



The **Western Sydney University Solar Car Team** is a good example of a team of WSU students who work together to build a solar car and race it. (Image: Western Sydney University)

What’s needed for successful teamwork?

Research into teams demonstrates that successful teamwork needs both **people skills** and **project management skills**.

To help manage your team and achieve your team’s objective, complete the team charter at the end of this document.

People skills

Teams work well when team members:

- share goals
- trust, respect, and support each other
- feel safe to communicate their ideas
- pay attention to people skills like reading how people feel through nonverbal signs

Teams work poorly when team members:

- put themselves above the team
- are disrespectful or untrustworthy
- complain or criticise
- believe that “teams always fail” and don’t commit to working towards team success

It’s normal for team members to disagree at times, especially when the team is in the early stages of formation. If you manage your disagreements and debates well and in a respectful way, it can lead to a wider range of ideas and better

decisions. However, conflict can harm the team's functioning and productiveness, so you do need to make an effort to prevent or manage it.

Some ways to prevent and manage conflict include communicating clearly and assertively (but not aggressively), trying to understand the other's perspective, and looking for a solution that benefits everyone. Creating a team charter where team members agree on team goals and behaviours can help prevent conflicts and provides agreed-on strategies to deal with them if they arise.

Project management skills

Successful teams define the project (project scope) and manage the project tasks effectively.

What is 'scope'? Scope is essentially what is included, and what is not included, in the project. To define scope, you need to decide the deliverables required for the project, and their features.

Examples of deliverables and features at university could include a presentation of 15 minutes with visual aids, a report of 2000 words with tables and figures, or an essay of 1500 words with scholarly references.

If your project is a team assignment, the assignment information will tell you what the deliverables and features are.

You must also decide what features are not in project scope. That is, what you won't include as part of the project.

Actions

1. Define the project's scope, and how you will know your team has achieved the project objectives.
2. Break the project into small, manageable tasks.
3. Estimate how long each task will take.
4. Plan the order in which to do the tasks. (Some tasks cannot be started until another one is completed, while some tasks can be done at the same time.)
5. Allocate tasks.
6. Track progress of tasks.
7. Adjust project plan if tasks are running behind schedule.

Projects have due dates, budgets and other constraints. Three inter-related project constraints are **scope**, **schedule**, and **cost**, often called the 'Project Management Triangle'. Cost includes not only money but also amount of work (hours x people) and other costs.

Together, scope, schedule and cost determine the quality of your project deliverables.



Cartoon created by the Academic Literacies Team using Toondoo

Use existing skills and develop new skills

Get to know the skills and experience that team members have, and how you can use them in your team project. You can learn from each other to develop new skills.

Pay attention to areas in which skills are needed, where team members don't have experience. One or more team members may need to develop skills in that area. You will also want to track these areas to ensure that they don't become a problem.

For example, your team may need to schedule project tasks, but nobody in the team has done it before. To develop skills, one or more team members might learn how to schedule tasks. Also, team members could be assigned to track task schedules by paying extra attention to whether tasks are running to time.

Steps and tools for teamwork success

Team charter

A tool that teams can use to prepare themselves for working together successfully is a "Team Charter" or "Teamwork Agreement". To complete a team charter, all team members discuss and agree on aspects such as team goals and behaviours.

Developing and agreeing on important aspects of working in a team, as when preparing a Team Charter, can help you to avoid major problems with your team and get your team goals achieved.

Try using this guide to develop your own Team Charter. You can update later if you want to. For example, the situation or project could change, you may get new information, or you may learn better ways of working together.

Team charter guide

Use the example team charter below to see how to fill one out. You can download a blank team charter for yourself by clicking on the following link: [Download Team Charter](#)

TEAM CHARTER			
Team name: TZVS Report Team			
Date: 10 th August			
Charter Version: Version 2 <i>(If you have updated the charter, the version may be 2 or more.)</i>			
Team members	Relevant skills and experience <i>This information can help when allocating tasks. Consider team/people skills as well as project/outcome skills. Skills gaps can indicate areas to pay attention to.</i>		
Toni Collette	Is good at academic writing. Good negotiator.		
Zhao Wei	Did project management unit, is good at planning and scheduling. Good at keeping people on track.		
Vidya Balan	Research skills. Calm under pressure.		
Saba Mubarak	Good with details – good at editing etc. Good at giving and receiving feedback.		
Meeting roles and responsibilities <i>E.g., convener (organises meetings and agenda), note-taker/recorder (takes and distributes meeting notes), monitor (keeps meetings on track and on time), etc.</i> <i>Consider rotating roles between team members – that way everyone builds experience in all roles.</i>			
	August	September	October
Convener	Saba	Zhao	Vidya
Note-taker	Toni	Saba	Zhao
Monitor	Vidya	Toni	Saba
Snack organiser	Zhao	Vidya	Toni

<p>Team purpose <i>Why has the team been formed? What are the key objectives? (these may be the high level or best-case goals, such as “get mark of 80% or above”)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To research and report on youth homelessness in the Western Suburbs of Sydney 2. Submit by due date of 1st November 3. Obtain a mark of 75% or above
<p>Conditions of satisfaction <i>What is a ‘good enough’ outcome – the minimum achievement that team members are comfortable with? For example, an objective may be to get 80% or more on an assignment, but a ‘good enough’ outcome might be a pass.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submit on time 2. Obtain a mark of 60% or more 3. All team members have time to complete other assignments
<p>Commitments <i>What commitments are you making to each other? For example, be respectful, complete tasks on time.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend meetings on time • Be prepared for meetings • Be respectful of each other • Complete all work tasks on time • If work is running behind, let other team members know as soon as possible
<p>Making decisions <i>How will you make decisions? For example, does the team make decisions by consensus after whole-team discussion? Under what conditions might your team accept decisions made by fewer than the whole team (for example, if someone has particular expertise)?</i> Decisions made by consensus of whole team Where all team members cannot agree, decide by majority vote</p>
<p>Managing conflict <i>Some conflict is likely: how will you manage it so it doesn’t become a problem? For example, seek to understand the perspective of the other person/people; try for a solution where everyone benefits; seek a mediator if necessary</i> Seek to understand the perspective of the other person Try for a solution where everyone benefits Seek a mediator if necessary Refer to the team charter conduct guidelines that everyone has agreed on</p>
<p>Preferred contact information and methods for team members <i>Email address, etc.</i> Toni 13900001@student.westernsydney.edu.au Zhao 13900123@student.westernsydney.edu.au Vidya 13900321@student.westernsydney.edu.au Saba 13904441@student.westernsydney.edu.au ALSO create a WhatsApp group for messaging</p>
<p>Communication guidelines <i>Agree on how often to communicate, how quickly to respond, what methods you will use, and what boundaries to set. For example, a daily activity summary email unless something is urgent? Respond to email within two days? Will you use instant messaging? Avoid messaging after a certain time of day?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student email for important messages • WhatsApp team group for instant messaging • Respond to messages within a day except for weekends • Weekly update on what team members have been doing until end of September • From October to submission, daily updates

More resources

Teamwork and project management

You can learn more about working in a team and project management at Lynda.com. As a Western student, you have free access to all Lynda.com courses. See [this page](#) to learn how to log in, or if you already have an account, go straight to [LinkedIn Learning](#) and search for courses about teamwork and project management. The Team Charter in this document is from the one-hour course [Communication within Teams](#). The course “[Project Management Simplified](#)” takes about an hour to complete and you can apply it to the context that you are in. For example, the project requirements are the assessment guidelines.

You can also find useful information about working in groups/teams, including managing communication and conflicts, on the [Library Study Smart Downloads page](#).



© Western Sydney University 2016-2021, unless stated otherwise.
Study Smart Website & PDF Guides by Library Academic Literacies
Team 2016-2021 (see below) is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

Kim Heckenberg (Manager)	Katrina Trewin
Linda Parker (Manager)	Claire Urbach
Tahlia Birnbaum	Anna Wallace
Tae McKnight	Fiona Webber
Beverley Miles	Lisa Worthington
Sara Perley	