

## WORKING IN GROUPS

**Dr. Paul R. Carr**

Often, in life, we are called up to work in groups or teams. It is hard to imagine one profession where some explicit and in-depth collaboration with others is not a cornerstone to the work required. In education, as students and teachers, we are continually required to consult with others, and to work with others in finding solutions as well as developing, both as individuals and as a collectivity.

Working with others requires developing critical skills that are beneficial in a range of areas. Being able to understand the perspectives, experiences and vantage-points of others is integral to advancing learning. Similarly, being able to conceptualize strategies, plans and approaches in a group is an indispensable skill.

Although skills and knowledge are essential pre-requisites for effectively working together, group type of work can also cultivate and enhance attitudes and behaviors that are conducive to constructively working in a team-situation. One of the key determinants in securing employment and contributing to socio-political projects and movements is how well one can work with others.

In sociology, being able to connect with others is imperative to be able to understand how people can experience the same phenomenon (for example, education) so differently. Within the context of university courses, here are some suggestions for working with others:

1. Make sure to fully understand the assignment or activity before starting.
2. Approach people with whom you feel you will be able to effectively complete the assignment. Be open to difference.
3. Sometimes we might discover that working with people with whom we feel we do not have much in common can be an enriching experience. It is sometimes preferable to find like-minded people with whom to work but this is not always possible. In fact, we are often obliged to work with others, and,

throughout history, this is how change has been effectuated (for example, the civil rights movement in the US, reparations for Japanese-Canadians, formal recognition for the harm caused by the Canadian government to First Nations through residential schools, the present-day peace movement, and the international environment movement are examples of how diverse coalitions have come together to achieve a common goal).

4. Start the project early. Waiting until the end of the semester to meet with colleagues to divide up the work is the least desirable way of approaching an assignment.
5. Determine how each of the members of the team will be contacted: e-mail, phone, face-to-face meetings, meetings before and after class, etc..
6. Think about how the work will be approached. Ideally, each of the members of the group should undertake some research, do some readings, and then be prepared to discuss with others how the assignment should be addressed. The least effective way of dividing the work is for each of the partners to independently write a section, and then to simply collate the final assignment together. By doing so, this will be obvious to the reader, and will likely not elucidate the main themes in a seamless and meaningful fashion
7. Students should independently do research, which will then augment the overall discussion for the assignment.
8. Students should discuss with one another how the work will be put together. Ultimately, although each of the participants may write a particular section, the entire document should be re-viewed and re-written collectively to ensure that the assignment reads as a tightly crafted piece in the same voice.
9. If it looks like the parties are unable to meet, cannot get along, cannot agree on the division of the work, and are unlikely to produce a satisfactory piece of work, then it would be helpful to speak with the

Instructor as soon as possible. Normally, with good will and hard work, producing the work should not only be an enjoyable experience but the result will most likely be better than if only one person were to have undertaken the assignment.

10. Group work involves a group effort. The final output will be reflective of the work of all of the participants.