

Developing Teamwork Skills

1. Be organised

Start early, to prepare and set realistic goals for yourself and for your students. Prepare a document clarifying your expectations of students and have very clear objectives regarding the aims of the teamwork exercise. Be explicit regarding the consequences if members do not contribute to the team exercise.

2. Provide students with practical reasons to encourage them to develop teamworking skills.

Include stories or examples which demonstrate the importance of being a good teamworker in the context of your discipline. Be a “team player role model” yourself. Encourage shy students to participate and discourage extroverts from dominating the group.

3. Introduce students early to the theory associated with teamwork

Set pre-readings and related quizzes so that students are familiar with the theory of teamwork. Relevant theory includes Tuckman’s (1965) Team Stages (Form, Storm, Norm, Perform) and Belbin Team Roles (www.belbin.com). Reinforce that successful teamwork is about planning, communication, equitable delegation of responsibilities and effective conflict resolution.

4. Have students develop their own Team Charter

This document is developed by the team members and can include information about roles, responsibilities, timeframes, means of communication and resolving conflict. As much as the document itself is important, the process of developing the document provides opportunities for students to share their expectations about delegation of responsibilities and timelines. The time and effort invested in this process is well worth it!

5. Be clear about assessment and consider strategies for self and peer assessment

Have assessment items that are manageable for students and which pose authentic problems. Challenges regarding the assessment of teamwork are mostly associated with “freeloaders” and “perfectionists”. Conflict surrounding these challenges can be significantly reduced with the use of a Self and Peer Assessment Tool. Email ed-dev@cqu.edu.au for more information on the Self and Peer Assessment Tool.

6. Act as a facilitator of learning rather than the deliverer of knowledge

Maintain a balance between facilitating learning and delivering knowledge so that students develop problem solving skills and the capacity for lifelong learning. Some lecturers at the end of a session ask students to share what they have learned. These comments are recorded and are made available for students.

7. Encourage the use of technology to communicate

Remind students to use email, forums, live chat rooms and other technologies such as skype and googledocs. Ask students to share what works best for them.

8. Recognise that “storming” will occur and provide appropriate conflict resolution strategies

Be prepared to assist teams that are experiencing conflict or are underperforming. Some lecturers have regular “check-in” sessions where team members provide an update on how the team is functioning. This update can provide the lecturer with an early warning signal to review the composition of some teams.

9. Consider incorporating some fun and team games

Team building exercises can assist in building trust within the team. It can also be fun! These activities are sometimes used as “Icebreakers” and can be as simple as asking students to share their favourite place or movie.

10. Encourage self-reflection and reflection on group processes

Ask students to reflect on their role within the team, and on the processes used to communicate, to make decisions and resolve conflict. Some courses require students to submit a reflective journal as part of the assessment. Remember to include reflection time for yourself.