

Teamwork and Teamwork Assessment

Your career success will largely depend on your ability to work effectively with people who have different perspectives, attitudes, and backgrounds than you. One of the most challenging and important skills you will be asked to develop during this project is that of effective teamwork. The basis of good teamwork is a shared desire for the team, and not just individuals, to excel. *Although you will receive individual grades for this project, you will be evaluated on how well you have worked within the context of the team, not as an individual achiever.*

Effective teamwork does not mean avoiding conflict; it means drawing out all viewpoints and ideas, commitment to informed debate and analysis, active listening, ability to give constructive feedback, openness to changing one's mind, and management of conflict. In fact, if your team is "getting along" quite peacefully, it may actually mean that you are not thinking critically as a team.

It is very important to have lots of team discussion time prior to meetings with advisors and liaisons and as major decisions about the report need to be made. Your partners should always know what you are going to say during a meeting—*never "spring surprises" on each other*. Do not pass in material that you have worked on alone and not shown to your partners. Put everyone's name on everything, in alphabetical order. Do not denigrate the performance of your partners in front of your advisors or liaisons. Do not spend your part of the meeting trying to make yourself look good; spend it trying to make the whole team look good. In this context you should find yourself using "we" more than "I"—just make sure that you have discussed and agree upon statements where you use "we"!

A major challenge that advisors face is evaluating the teamwork component of projects. Although we will see you in action during formal and informal meetings and will see the outcomes of your work, we rarely see the "daily grind" and process of teamwork behind the scenes. Some teams try to hide concerns about individuals' efforts or their team processes thinking that bringing it out in the open will reflect poorly on their "group dynamics." Judgments that advisors make in such situations can be inaccurate and unintentionally unfair. Of even more concern in these situations is the fact that teams do not learn much about effective teamwork. Even teams that work effectively together may not in fact learn much about teamwork if they do not reflect on the processes that they used. Imagine yourself in an interview with a potential employer: "I was lucky. My team got along really well!" does not convey that you learned anything whatsoever about teamwork development.

To address these limitations of advisors' evaluation of teamwork, to promote deeper learning about teamwork, and to prepare you for professional work environments, **each team will be responsible for developing and proposing its own TEAMWORK ASSESSMENT PROCESS.** The assessment process must have the following components and characteristics:

- It must include a formative (i.e., for purposes of improvement) component at least once during the term, as well as a summative component at the end of the project.
- Individual contributions to the team must be assessed as well as the team as a whole. Your assessments of each other and of the team must be shared and discussed with team members before being given to advisors.
- The assessment reports must be persuasive to advisors. There should be tangible evidence of learning about teamwork. *Actions* planned or taken as a result of the assessment process should be stated clearly.
- The assessment reports should be sincere and self-critical, showing introspection about multiple aspects of teamwork.

Overall, we want to see individual and group formative and summative assessments that show deep reflection about the teamwork process and about individuals' contributions. Following are examples of what teamwork assessments could include. This list is not exhaustive and is not meant to be prescriptive; propose what you think will be useful:

- The group could define rules, process guidelines, and/or team norms and a way to monitor them, and can show evidence that the monitoring process was implemented in a thoughtful manner.
- Important attributes of good team members could be defined, with a rubric that describes various levels of performance. Team members could do periodic self- and peer- assessments using this rubric and identify changes and actions taken as a result.
- The group could submit examples of managerial documents it uses to coordinate individual and group efforts. (This in and of itself would not be sufficient but could be an element of your process.)
- The group could reflect on the various co-authoring strategies being used, assessing the strengths and limitations of each.

In developing your teamwork assessment proposal, we encourage you to reflect on your experience in C-term, the challenges you faced, and your strengths and weaknesses.

Most students have not had much experience in active listening and giving constructive feedback to others. Following are a few best practices:

- Team members' *opinions* are not really relevant or useful in project work. What really matters and what will advance your project is your *analysis* of choices and issues. Here analysis is distinguished from an opinion in that it involves use of evidence and/or use of criteria in decision making.
- Instead of formulating a response in your head while others are speaking, listen to them with the intent of understanding, then paraphrase what you think they said. Repeat until you get it right.
- Constructive feedback depends upon the following realizations: each of us can be an expert on our own feelings and on how other peoples' behavior affects us, but we have no idea of other peoples' feelings and how our behavior is perceived by others.
- Try using the following method when giving feedback to others: *When you/we...* (FACTS of observable behavior, without judgment or exaggeration)...*I feel...*(explain how their behavior affects you)...*because I...*(explain connection between observable facts and your response). *I would like...*(describe the change you would like to see)...*because...* (why you think the change will help). *What do you think?...* Listen to response, ask for and give clarification, discuss options, and agree on a solution.

Many of these suggestions were drawn from <http://lowery.tamu.edu/Teaming/Morgan1/sld054.htm>, which contains more information and examples.

We want to emphasize that this teamwork assessment process is *not* a game; we are trying to develop your ability to self-assess since that will be so important in your professional career. *Ultimately, we advisors will still need to make a judgment about your teamwork process, but it will be an evaluation of your team's self-assessment.* Critical, thorough, reflective assessments that reveal team dysfunctions and successes will be evaluated much more highly than superficial, self-congratulatory assessments that show little learning about the complexity of teamwork. We expect that you will face challenges in working together and managing conflicts in a constructive way. Our goal is to bring those challenges out in the open to promote communication and most especially, learning.