

Tips for Participating in Group Work Online

So you've been assigned a group project in your distance learning course... now what? If you've never participated in online group work before, you are probably wondering how it works. If you have participated in online group work in past courses, you may be looking for tips on improving the experience. Every group assignment is different, but many of the following tips may be appropriate for your group and help you on your way to success with the assignment.

1. Get to know the other members of your group. Share information about work experiences, prior education, interests, skills, etc. This information will help the group when determining what role each member will play.
2. Exchange contact information (i.e. email, phone, instant messaging IDs, etc.), time zones, and schedule constraints.
3. Appoint a leader for the group who will commit to keeping the group on track, oversee all work, facilitate decisions, keep the instructor up-to-date, etc. Define the specific role of the leader.
4. Divide responsibilities according to the strengths of each group member.
5. Discuss guidelines with the group. Guidelines should include how you will communicate, how decisions will be made, timelines for completing the work and rules for missing milestones, how to deal with group members who don't fully contribute, etc. Put these guidelines in writing so you can refer back to them when issues arise.
6. Come to a group decision on how to communicate and how often the communications will take place. The group may find it helpful to have a weekly schedule for working on the project and communicating with each other. Some communication options are:
 - a. *myWPI Discussion Boards* – Many instructors set up group areas within course sites and group discussion boards are available in the group areas. If you select this mode of communication, make sure you check the discussion boards frequently.
 - b. *E-mail* – Some groups prefer just to email each other. Be sure to identify which email address each member will be using for group work. Many students do not use their WPI accounts on a regular basis, so a work or home email address may be best.
 - c. *Interwise iMeeting* – This web conferencing tool is available for group work. It allows participants to meet in a live virtual web-based environment with voice, graphics, and application sharing. Upon request, generic accounts can be set up for your course that will allow anyone in the class to schedule iMeeting events for their groups. Learn more about Interwise iMeeting at <http://www.wpi.edu/+ATC/Facilities/Interwise/>.
 - d. *myWPI Virtual Classroom* – This tool allows for live collaboration via a whiteboard and text chat. To learn more, go to <http://www.wpi.edu/+ATC/Collaboratory/HowTo/MyWPI/usingclassroom-student.html>.
 - e. *Instant Messaging* – Free instant messaging tools, such as AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, and others can be installed on your computers so you can meet via live text chat. This software is not available from WPI, but is easily found online.
 - f. *Phone* – Phone conferencing is not provided by WPI, but you can make your own phone conferencing arrangements. Some groups find it easier to discuss their ideas over the phone.
7. Pull your weight. There is nothing more frustrating than having someone on your team who does not fully contribute and still gets a good grade due to the efforts of the other team members. Make sure you are not the person who lets the team members down.