

INTERCOLLEGIATE COLLEGE OF NURSING
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Working in Groups: Succeeding in the Collaborative Process:

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Teachers often require students to work with others on group projects. Working in groups may be a new and different experience for the student. Working in groups online can complicate matters even more.

The following information is given to help you understand the process that successful groups use to problem solve. Each group experience is different. What you bring to the group is more important than what you find. So plan to participate: listen, learn, contribute.

There are various kinds of group tasks to accomplish.

- The easiest task is the type of work the group members can divide and then put together at the end. Wise groups edit the final document for clarity, smoothness, transitions, and adherence to the project requirements.
- The most difficult group task is usually a problem-based scenario. Medicine and nursing often use case studies where students are then expected to analyze the situation, decide what they need to know, how to find out the needed information, then solve the problem, and present the solution to others.

They are many levels between these two opposites. Since working in groups is the most common way of solving problems in the professional world, learning to make decisions with others is a vital part of your education.

The collaborative process has recognized phases that involve all members of the learning process. The following outline gives an idea of what occurs in an online collaborative group and how the student can use the process to excel. The following information is based upon the Collaborative Problem Solving theory developed by Laurie Nelson (1999).

- The first phase is PREPARE: During this phase the instructor does much of the work.
 - The instructor prepares for the class by giving students an overview of
 - Communication processes
 - Class requirements
 - The collaborative problem solving process
 - Organize the groups: can be done a variety of ways
 - The instructor can divide people into groups
 - The class members can organize themselves
 - Agree upon the problem: group members interpret the problem and define it by:
 - Brainstorming (as long as possible)

- Recording and summarizing what you have done to stay organized and unified
 - Establish roles: Students or instructors decide what the roles are and what is expected of each role.
 - Organizer
 - Recorder
 - Contributor

- The second phase is WORK: This is usually a non-linear process and occurs differently online than in face-to-face groups. Some methods of communication are truncated due to asynchronous environments. You must plan ahead and finish your product early so that everyone can edit the final product before the due date. This phase should take the most time. Online projects take about twice as long as face-to-face projects.
 - Plan and assign work: A good plan saves time, worry, and confusion. Take time to plan.
 - Work
 - Build in accountability for group members: Set due dates, etc.
 - Beware of the follow the leader syndrome: Copying the message style of the first contributor. If messages are all social and no content, the group will not thrive. The opposite is also true. Moderation is the key here. Combine social and learning activities.
 - Use weekly summaries to condense progress, validate progress, and hasten movement toward goals. Summaries clarify process when there are lots of ideas and conversation. They prevent duplication of efforts and neglecting important tasks.
 - Finalize the work: Members reach a point when all the individual work comes together.
 - Members need time to reflect upon progress and content

- The last phase is CONCLUDE:
 - Evaluate the product and the process: It is best to have a rubric or criteria for evaluation to avoid conflict and to match teacher expectations
 - Close:
 - Different types of closure depend on the amount of engagement and effort expended by the group.
 - Celebrate the work, the connections, and the relationships. Struggles overcome are celebrations.

Working on a learning project is like going on a safari. One can plan, prepare, and work hard and still end up with negative adventures. BUT... The more one plans, prepares, and works, the more likely one is to succeed. Polite conversation, hard work, negotiation, diplomacy, accountability, etc. are all needed for collaboration. Enjoy the adventure. Research indicates students working in groups learn a lot more than those working alone.

Reference:

Nelson, L. (1999). Collaborative problem-solving. In. C. M. Reigeluth. (Ed.)

Instructional-Design Theories and Models. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum

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