

Resource One: Group Role Profiles

When working in groups, each member must be respectful of the agreed upon goals and constraints of the project. Because group work may be new to many students, it is suggested that you spend some time reviewing the following profiles of member roles. By assigning different responsibilities to members of your group, each of you will contribute to the group end product. Some roles, such as the “questioner,” may feel awkward at first, but continue to hold all members accountable for refocusing discussion or questioning ideas and beliefs. The group activities are designed to teach you how better to organize and manage your time and resources, to prioritize goals, and to reach compromise when there is dissent amongst group members concerning the group project approach, process, content, and mode of presentation. Regardless of your career goals after graduation, most of you will be required to work with others in a collaborative fashion and most employers view this as the most important skill an employee can possess. This is especially true in science where most research is done in collaboration with others, as one can easily see by counting the number of authors named on any article in the primary literature.

These roles do not replace or supersede the tasks in your group’s assignment. They are designed to help you be aware of the way your group works together toward a common goal and to help you develop strategies for successful collaboration with your peers.

Time Keeper: This role is self-explanatory and critical for group success. To keep the group on task, the timekeeper may opt to warn members periodically of time remaining to complete the assignment. Alternatively, the timekeeper may choose to take a pro-active approach and dictate the time allotted for each task to complete the assignment at the outset. The timekeeper will work closely with the Process Mediator and the Note Taker. With respect to the group end product, the timekeeper must make sure that the product can be presented in its entirety in the time allotted during the class sharing time.

Process Mediator: This role is perhaps one of the most difficult because the process mediator must make sure that all voices are heard, that all members use the rules of conduct established by the group, and that the group is working towards a common goal. If there is dysfunction in the group, it is the process mediator’s responsibility to assess the situation and alert the group to the source of dysfunction. It is the group’s responsibility to resolve the issues that are hindering progress, not the process mediator.

Questioner: This role assures that the group is using higher order reasoning skills. The questioner serves as “Devil’s Advocate,” and in this way points out things that the group may have overlooked, or helps the group consider other options and counter-arguments for their course of action. The questioner should try to anticipate different views of opinion or approaches to solve the problem. The questioner must voice these points to the group and ask for group response.

Answerer: The answerer assures that the group will be able to elaborate their ideas and answer questions posed by other groups or the instructor during the sharing period of the class. The answerer should pay close attention to questions posed by any member of the group and the

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answers that come out of group discussion. The answerer should present the consensus views of the group not individual opinions or ideas.

Note Taker/Reporter: This role involves taking notes and organizing the notes of others in the group to synthesize a collaborative product that represents the views and ideas of the group. The note taker may need to delegate smaller note taking tasks to ensure that the group has adequate time to use all available resources. The note taker should also involve group members in decisions that concern the mode of presentation of the group end product during the sharing period of the class.

Suggestions for Successful Group Dynamics

- To ensure that all voices are heard, have each member speak for 30 seconds without interruption until all members have spoken. Then begin an open discussion.
- Establish signals and rules of conduct at the beginning and be sure that all members are aware of these rules and signals.
- When disagreement arises do not shut down; try to move past it by allowing opposing members 30 seconds of uninterrupted time to explain their support or lack of support for a particular aspect of the project.