

5 WORKING WITH OTHERS

You will need to work with others in Higher Education in several different kinds of contexts. It is likely that you will already have experience of these situations, but in a new environment, with new people, you will have to think carefully about whether you are making effective use of the opportunities afforded to you.

Working co-operatively with others can create wonderful opportunities to share ideas and to gain new perspectives and points of view through tapping into a wider pool of experience and knowledge. An important advantage of discussing ideas with others is that you will clarify your own thinking by expressing your own ideas. You will find through discussion and talking through your own understanding of topics they are more likely to be remembered.

Group-work is increasingly the favoured method of learning and teaching in Higher Education and so you will have many opportunities to work co-operatively. Courses include group work because, in employment, most work is carried out by people working together to share resources and abilities. The many advantages of this way of working include the non-threatening and supportive environment that fellow students offer to each other and this encourages the development of good communication skills. Group-work requires that you both contribute actively, and that you listen to others in a supportive and encouraging manner. It is a two-way process.

The seminar group fosters the formation of friendships and peer support. Working with others enables the exchange of ideas and information, for example, where to find good resources, and who has which books out from the library.

It is often the case that students are anxious about speaking in a group, especially when the group is a new one. It is worth practising some strategies to help you over this hurdle:

- Decide to speak at least once during the group.
- Sit next to someone who you are comfortable with.

- Even if you don't say it, write down what you would have liked to have said.
- Make eye contact with at least one person in the group and try to maintain this as you speak.
- Take your time, breathe slightly slower, and speak slowly and clearly.
- Try and act as though you are confident and smile, even if this is false!

When listening to others there are some points you can remember to help them:

- Be aware that even though they might not appear to be, they may be anxious.
- Listen attentively and give them eye contact. Respond with a smile, and a nod, as the minimum.
- Do not interrupt but try to be aware of turn-taking and allow everyone to have their say.
- Encourage others in the group by asking questions, e.g., 'Did anybody think that...?', 'I really didn't understand the point about..., can anyone help?'
- Help to move discussions on e.g., 'Why don't we note the key points that we have discussed and move on to talk about...'

Challenges

There will be times when group discussions are not productive. There may be silences and dead ends. If this happens, try getting everyone to 'brainstorm' some ideas and pass these around. If you are still getting nowhere, ask the tutor for some help rather than wasting the time.

There will be times when one or two members of the group will dominate and others will feel that there is no space for them to contribute. This is a difficult situation to deal with but you can address it by saying something like 'wouldn't it be useful if everyone said something about their views on this?'

If you find that you are continually working with a group that results in your feeling frustrated or excluded, then it is important that you make the

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move to work with a different set of people. If you cannot manage this, have a quiet word with your tutor. Remember, you are at University because you want to be and you must make the most of your time by doing whatever you can to make it work for you!

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GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

You may be required to produce an assessed piece of work, for example a presentation, by working collaboratively with a small group. This can be very challenging as it is frequently the case that students feel there is a degree of unfairness concerning the amount that individuals contribute.

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Before you begin you should agree some ground rules for how you operate as a group. Clarify your goals and break down the tasks into sub-tasks with deadlines that can be allocated to group members with a view to keeping workloads fair and equal.

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- Write down what is agreed.
- Review the progress regularly so that problems are identified early.
- If someone is not pulling their weight you must deal with this collectively.
- Identify the cause (do they have a good reason for not contributing?).
- Focus on the group, not the person ('we've got a problem...').
- Focus on the problem, not the person ('If it isn't done we won't be able to meet our deadline').
- Express your feelings before they get out of hand ('I'm worried about...').
- It may be necessary to speak to your tutor.

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● **For further advice see section 7: 'ACADEMIC WRITING' - Assessment.**

MAKING A PRESENTATION

As a Higher Education student you will be expected to participate in the process of examining knowledge. Presentations of information to a group are an important way in which academics share knowledge with each other. It is a vital part of your learning experience.

Planning the presentation

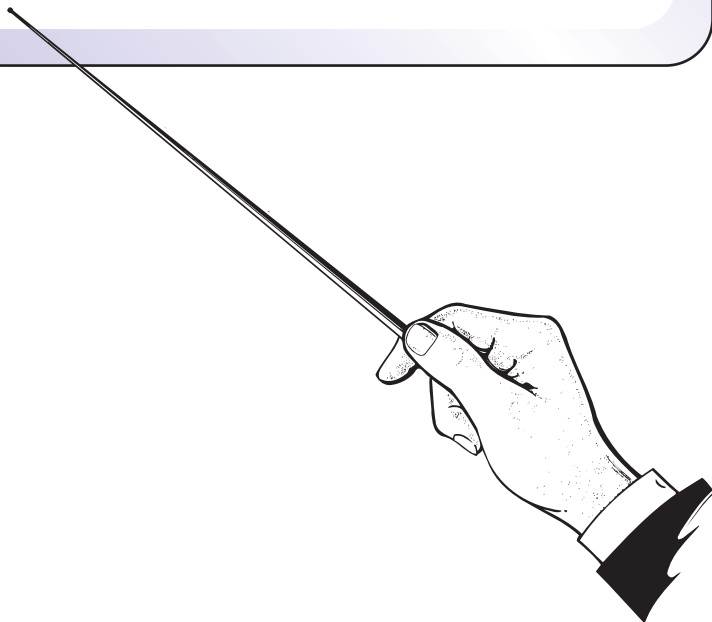
1. When planning a presentation you must firstly be clear of the basics:
Have you been given a title or are you expected to talk on a more general topic?
How long should the presentation last?
What is the date of the presentation?
Be familiar with the criteria for assessment.
2. Write down some key words relating to the topic and think about the preparation that you will need to do. Focus on your reading. Take notes, but ensure that you are focussed on the topic of your presentation. Keep the length of the presentation in mind. If you have only 10 minutes you will need to ensure that you are very clear about the central points that you want to make. If you have longer, you have a little time to elaborate on your central points.
3. Note down the structure for the presentation. Frame the structure in note form. You will not remember all that you want to say. A good rule is that for each page of notes, expect to spend approximately 3 minutes talking. Use a coloured pencil to mark the halfway point of your presentation – this will help you to pace yourself.
4. Your notes should be **notes**. They should contain key points and one or two illustrations, for example, quotations or statistics, etc. Make sure that they are very clear and that the structure is logical – each point should follow the other. You should have a brief introduction and a few words to sum up in conclusion. The conclusion is the part that will remain in the minds of your audience.
5. Practise your talk several times, going slowly and timing yourself. Edit it down if its too long. If possible, practise with a friend and ask for their advice on how the presentation might be improved.
6. It is very useful to you and your audience if you provide visual aids. There is usually an Overhead Projector (OHP) and a flip chart or white board in classrooms. Ask your tutor if you would like to use the OHP but are not sure how to go about this. It will be useful for your audience to have key points on a handout. Speak from a poster, from an OHP, from a handout or with the aid of postcards with headings. **It is important to have notes that you can use as prompts to your memory so that you do not need to have your head down reading the whole time, but can maintain some eye contact with your audience.**
 - Divide your material into essential points.
 - Break your talk into sections.
 - Give each section a heading.
 - Write one heading, and a few easily-read prompt words onto separate postcards.
 - Number the cards in the order that you want to introduce those points.
 - Repeat main points and summarise what you have said.

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GIVING A PRESENTATION

If you prepare carefully you will be confident about what you have to say. Try and make sure that you are in the room before everybody else so that you can check you have the equipment you need and that the room is arranged as you would like it. If you are nervous it will help you if you smile at your audience and if you have a drink to hand. Introduce your talk by summarising what you are going to cover. Go through your material clearly and slowly and pause between each point. In the pauses you can ensure that you look at your audience and try and have eye contact. At the end, smile and say 'Thank you'.

- ✓ Check you are sitting in a space with access to all your visual aids.
- ✓ Make sure your notes are in the right order.
- ✓ Ensure you can see everyone in the group.
- ✓ Make sure you can see a watch to keep to time.
- ✓ Make sure your handouts/transparencies are in the right order and that the OHP is working.
- ✓ Remind people, as you start, what the topic is about.
- ✓ Check that everyone can hear you at the beginning.
- ✓ If you are nervous, tell the group and they will be on your side!
- ✓ Remember to smile and breathe and pause between points.



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WORKSHEET 5

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Self Evaluation Workshop

A How well do you contribute to the seminars and groups that you have had experience with? Evaluate your contributions using the chart below on a scale of 1 – 5 1 = room for improvement, 5 = excellent.

Doing the appropriate amount of preparation	_____
Making contributions during sessions	_____
Speaking for your fair share of the time	_____
Asking questions and making comments relevant to the discussion	_____
Listening to, and considering points raised by other people	_____
Encouraging the presenter or other speakers	_____
Encourage less confident people in the group	_____
Taking a full part	_____
Taking relevant notes	_____
Giving full attention to the session and not being distracted	_____

Discuss your ability to work in seminars and groups with another group member. Do they agree with your self-evaluation? Ask them to tell you three things that you do well when working with others, and three things that you could improve on.

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B How effective are you when giving a talk?

If you have had experience of giving a talk to fellow students, or in a different context, you can evaluate your effectiveness on the check-list below and reflect on how you might improve aspects when you give presentations in Higher Education.

Rate your effectiveness on a scale of 1-5. 1 = ineffective 5 = effective

Began with a confident smile	_____
Gave a brief outline of key points	_____
Kept to my outline	_____
Made my argument and key ideas clear	_____
Moved logically from point to point	_____
Provided illustrative examples	_____
Concluded with a summing up of ideas	_____
Made regular eye contact with the audience	_____
Encouraged questions and responded well	_____
Did the reaction of the audience suggest an effective talk?	_____

Now write a list of points that you feel you should bear in mind when preparing and giving your next talk. Compare your experiences and ideas for improvement with a partner. Do they have the same insecurities and experience the same difficulties? Do they have any additional useful pointers for overcoming difficulties?