Better group work

A field guide for working with classmates who think differently

Nobody should have to read minds to join a team. Good group work makes the task, roles, communication, and repair process visible to everyone.

10 PRACTICAL MOVES

1 Write down the destination

Before dividing work, agree on what the finished product looks like, its quality criteria, and when it is due.

2 Choose roles together

Ask who wants to research, draft, edit, present, or coordinate. Do not assign roles based on disability assumptions or who speaks first.

3 Break up the invisible work

Name who will set up the document, track deadlines, confirm citations, and submit the final version. “Someone will do it” is not a plan.

4 Share a written recap

After meetings, send decisions, owner names, next actions, and dates. The recap should benefit the whole group.

5 Make room for different responses

Offer an agenda in advance and leave space for written ideas or a short pause before decisions.

6 Ask about preferences, not labels

Try “Would messages or a quick meeting work better for you?” Avoid asking classmates to explain private medical information.

7 Clarify rather than interpret

If a message sounds abrupt, ask what was intended. Different communication habits do not automatically mean hostility.

8 Create a check-in point

Set a brief progress review before the final due date. A team can correct course earlier and with less blame.

9 Discuss missed work specifically

Say what did not arrive, how it affects the team, and what needs to happen now. Avoid personality judgments.

10 Build a repair route

Agree at the start how someone can request help, swap a role, flag a delay, or bring in the instructor when needed.

Read the full guide: ttwnest.org/for/classmates/

Questions, suggestions, or corrections? info@ttwnest.org

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PUT IT INTO WORDS

When a teammate misses a draft

LESS HELPFUL

“You clearly do not care about the project.”

TRY THIS INSTEAD

“We needed the summary yesterday to combine our sections. Can you send a draft by 4 p.m., or should we redistribute that piece today?”

It identifies impact, offers a workable choice, and does not guess why the work was late.

FIVE-MINUTE ACTION CHECKLIST

- [ ] Write the deliverable and shared deadline.
- [ ] Assign every task to a person, including final submission.
- [ ] Choose how the team communicates and records decisions.
- [ ] Schedule one early progress check.
- [ ] Agree on a respectful way to raise problems.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

Milton frames autistic/non-autistic communication differences as potentially reciprocal. Crompton and colleagues studied information transfer in a specific autistic peer-to-peer task. CAST provides useful design principles, but none of these sources establishes a universal template for every group project.

BOUNDARIES AND CAVEATS

Be clear without making every exchange clinical. Classmates are collaborators, not informal diagnosticians or substitute disability-services staff.

SOURCE STARTERS: Milton (2012) · Crompton (2020) · CAST (2024)

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