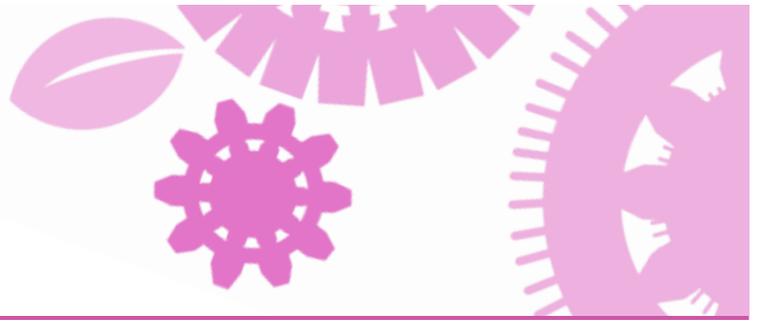# How to. . .

Communicate effectively when working in groups

An effective team communicates well. Poor communication is a very common cause of problems when people are working collaboratively. These tips will give you an idea of some key things to remember.

1. Understand what communication is

Communication is a two-way process. You have to receive information as well as transmit a message. This means listening, understanding and thinking about what people are trying to tell you, not just letting them know what you think.

2. Try and listen actively

We often think about what we are going to say next, rather than actually process what other people are saying. Taking brief notes can help with this. It is also important to let people know that you are listening to them with the occasional nod or by asking a question to let them know you are paying attention.

3. Give people time to speak

People should be given time to speak, especially in response to a major point or argument. Sometimes it is worth having some silence while people think about what has just been said. Try to avoid long speeches with no breaks!

4. Be aware of your body language

Not facing someone when they are talking to you or when you are talking to them, slouching or certain facial expressions can make people think that you do not want to communicate. If someone seems to be getting annoyed with you, check your body language, you may be sending out the wrong signals!

5. Be polite and adaptable

Everyone has a right to an opinion and it is perfectly possible to discuss a disagreement without getting personal. Focus on the task and try and be as professional and calm as possible. Know that sometimes you may need to compromise or let things go in order to move forward.

6. Show empathy and respect

Members of the group have lives outside the project and sometimes they may feel upset or unable to concentrate due to external factors. We all feel this way at times and no-one performs brilliantly hundred per cent of the time. Remember this and be nice!

7. Let people know what you think.

It is quite common for people to go with the majority rather than speak up about something they disagree with. If they feel strongly that it was the wrong decision and do not get the chance to say, it can lead to resentment later. At least, if a point is raised, it can be discussed and then the group can decide the best course of action.

8. Explain your thoughts

It is not enough to say what you think. You need to explain why you think what you think. Explain the reason. For example "that will not work" is not as effective as "I do not agree, that would take a lot of time and we need to get things done quickly".

9. Be encouraging and understanding

Some people do not have as much confidence as others. If you notice that someone is not taking part as much as they could, try to gently bring them into the conversation. Ask them what they think and be careful how you respond. A "that is one way of looking at it" is better than "That is stupid, no-one else agrees with that!"

10. Have some fun!

It is okay to have some fun. Try starting every meeting with something light-hearted! Get someone to tell a joke or mention something fun they did since the last meeting.

http://learnhigher.ac.uk/resources/files/Group%20work/communication.pdf