On some courses you will be expected to take part in a group project, which can be at any stage of your studies

a. Benefits of group projects - working on a group project is very useful experience, as you can:

• share ideas - each person then has more
• gain extra perspectives and points of view you might not have considered
• tap into a wider pool of knowledge, skills and experience
• stimulate others' thinking and clarify your own
• learn to manage challenge and criticism
• understand there are more dimensions to a question than you can explore on your own.

b. Key skills - group work helps you develop several skills which increase your employability:

• leadership
• working in a team
• negotiating with others
• motivating people

c. Self-awareness - working in a group helps you identify your own strengths and weaknesses. You will discover if you are best at:

• innovating
• leading
• completing things
• writing reports
• resolving conflicts

Again, very useful for employability
d. Results - effective groups can achieve much more than individuals working alone: you can apply a wider range of skills to a problem, and learn a lot by sharing and discussing ideas.

e. Stages of group projects - effective groups go through four stages:

- Familiarisation - Forming
- Preparation - Storming
- Activity - Norming
- Completion - Performing

Familiarisation

Group members get to know each other, their skills and interests and work out what they want to achieve:

- the product, which might be a report, presentation, poster, etc.
- the time scale
- the assessment; how will the product be assessed?

Good communication will be very important, so group members share addresses, phone numbers and email addresses. It may be useful to set up a blog or a wiki so that all contributions are seen and recorded - very useful when acknowledging individual contributions to the project as a whole.

Preparation

The group decides:

- what needs to be done - resources and tasks
- how to do it - format and expected outcomes
- how to divide up the tasks fairly, and at the same time
- how to make best use of people's skills and interests
**Activity**

Group members get on with their allotted tasks. While this is happening, communication is crucial; regular meetings are very important, as is keeping up with blogs, wikis etc.

Remember anything you contribute should be your own thoughts and words, or correctly referenced, just as if you were writing an assignment.

**Completion**

You will probably have to give a presentation and/or write a report - it's best to delegate the first draft to one of the team.
If the report has a chapter written by each team member, one of you needs to be the editor to make sure the overall style is consistent.

Remember to agree and document each group member's contribution.

**Tips for good groups**

Create a supportive group atmosphere:

- Remember that people can feel anxious, so always be constructive with comments
- Address those anxieties: share concerns at the start, and how you will deal with these
- Set ground rules for attendance, non-participation, unacceptable behaviour

Create an effective group environment

- Arrange meeting times and venues well in advance
- Set timed agendas for group meetings
- Have some less formal times too - but be clear which these are
- Check progress and group dynamics regularly
- Allocate tasks fairly and set clear deadlines
- At each meeting, nominate a chair, timekeeper, and note taker
- Have a task manager, who checks on progress between meetings

Remember - each member of the group is equally responsible for all aspects of the group's performance

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