

PREPARING TO WORK IN GROUPS

A Preparatory Exercise for Students Engaging in Learning and Project Groups

Purpose: To help students better engage in group-based learning.

Method: Students complete a questionnaire that provides them with feedback on a profile of factors that can influence their ability, willingness or capacity to work or learn in groups. Students then consider the practical implications of this information and set learning goals.

Time Required: Approximately 45mins. to 1.5 hours depending on the format chosen. The time required will be reduced if individuals complete the questionnaire prior to class or group meetings.

Format: This exercise can be undertaken in a number of different formats:

- As a reflective activity by *individual students* who are interested in better understanding the factors which may be helping or hindering their capacity to learn in groups.
- As a preparatory educational activity for a *whole class* that is new to groupwork or where class members may have had mixed previous experiences with group based learning methods.
- As an entry-level team development task for *newly formed learning or project groups*.

© Copyright 2004. Alf Lizzio and Keithia Wilson, School of Psychology (Mt. Gravatt), Griffith University, Brisbane.

You may make copies, in reasonable quantities, of this document provided this is not for resale or profit and each copy identifies the source.

Preparing to Work in Groups

The way we start is often the way we end up!

What is the value of doing this exercise?

. The “*starting attitude*” you bring to any activity (eg how confident you feel, your opinion of the value of an exercise, or whether you consider that you have the resources to do it well) can set the scene for how able or willing you are to engage in the work. There is considerable evidence to suggest that people who are able to actively place themselves in the most appropriate “state of mind” at the beginning of an activity achieve the most effective outcomes. Thus, in a very real sense, the way we start can be the way we end up!

This logic also strongly applies to the challenge of engaging in groupwork. How you feel about participating in group-based learning (ie. the “starting attitude” you bring to this type activity) can have a direct influence on how productive and enjoyable the experience turns out to be. It is certainly true that people have a *range of feelings* about the idea of working and learning in groups. Reactions range from enthusiasm to indifference, through to resentment and outright dread! This presents *real challenges* in forming effective learning and working groups. Not only does our starting attitude affect what we personally might “put into” and thus “get out of” the group experience, but it also affects the attitudes of other group members. All too often we try to “work around” (without ever openly discussing the issue) what we imagine to be the motivations and feelings that others bring to a group. Sometimes this is manageable, sometimes this reduces a group’s effectiveness and sometimes it falls apart and ends in conflict or resentment. The good news is that these issues can be prevented.

Thus, it is very often a *useful investment* at the beginning of a task to clarify our “starting state of mind.” This is particularly important in group-based activities because successful groupwork requires us to not only understand and manage ourselves, but also understand the attitudes and expectations that others bring to the task of “working and learning together.”

What will I achieve?

This exercise is designed to help you prepare for the task of working in groups. As a result of undertaking this process you can expect to:

- better *understand your own attitude* to working in groups
- appreciate the potential *range of reactions* and attitudes that people have to the idea of working in groups
- understand some of the *underlying reasons* for your own and others’ attitudes to working in groups
- enhance your *capacity to engage* in groupwork.

This exercise **is** simply intended to provide the basis for a discussion between people about their expectations and attitudes and how they might better work together with these in mind. This exercise **is not** a test of your suitability for group work.

What is involved?

In the *first section* we invite you to assess yourself on a range of factors that may influence how you feel about working and learning in groups.

In the *second section* we invite you to construct your group readiness profile. You are then given the opportunity to consider practical ways you might enhance your ability, willingness or capacity to participate in group based activities.

Section 1: Assessing Your Influencing Factors

The Group Readiness Questionnaire

Instructions: The purpose of this first step is to provide an opportunity for you to *assess yourself* on a range of factors that may influence how you feel about working and learning in groups. We will present you with a number of statements and ask you to circle a number from 1 to 7 that best represents your experience.

This exercise will be of most value if you *frankly and honestly* describe your current attitudes. Each of us has an individual set of experiences and perceptions. One profile is not necessarily preferable or better than another. Resist the temptation to “look good” in the way you respond. The aim of this exercise is to help you *honestly appraise* your capacity to work in groups. Presenting yourself in a way that you might think is more desirable will defeat the purpose of the exercise.

Read each of the following statements and then use the matching scales on the scoring sheet (page 6 of this booklet) to rate how characteristic each of these is of you. Please use the full range of the scale (from *not at all characteristic of me* to *very characteristic of me*) to describe your responses to each statement.

1. Work Preference

In this section you are invited to describe your *general preferences* for “ways of working.”

- A. I prefer learning situations where I am able to work on my own.
- B. I tend to look for opportunities to work with other students.
- C. I find completing a project by myself is the most satisfying way for me to work.
- D. I find I work best when I am working with others.

2. Previous history in groups

In this section you are invited to describe your *previous personal experiences* of working in learning groups and projects teams (eg at school, university, work).

- A. In my experience learning or project groups have often turned out to be more trouble than they are worth.
- B. I have found that working with other students in a group generally provides a better result than if I had worked by myself.
- C. I have found that other group members can be unreliable and difficult to work with.
- D. I have found working in teams with other students to be a productive experience.

3. Independent learning

In this section you are invited to describe your current *sense of confidence* to work in an independent and self managed learning format.

- A. I feel most secure when there is clear content and structure provided by an expert teacher.
- B. I am persistent in my approach to difficult learning tasks.
- C. I am confident in my ability to independently set and achieve my own learning goals.
- D. When I enter a new learning environment I am confident in my capacity to adapt to its requirements and expectations.

4. Self-efficacy in groups

In this section you are invited to assess how well you are able to *contribute* to effective group outcomes.

- A. I usually contribute actively to groups of which I am a member.
- B. I don't feel I have the skills to facilitate a small group discussion.
- C. I am pretty good at working with and building on other peoples' contributions in group discussions.
- D. I generally tend not to be aware of processes and interactions between people.

5. Availability

In this section you are invited to describe the extent to which you *experience time pressures and competing priorities* with your life and study.

- A. Given my present life circumstances I need to be careful not to take on any more commitments to do with university.
- B. Apart from this degree there are a lot of important priorities competing for my time at the moment.
- C. At present, finding enough time for university study is difficult for me.
- D. I am able to give my university study the time it deserves.

6. Meaningful context

In this section you are invited to describe the extent to which you consider that the idea of working in groups has been *sufficiently and meaningfully explained* to you.

- A. It's not clear how working in groups fits with the learning goals of the program.
- B. We have a meaningful rationale for why we are involved in group work.
- C. This "group exercise" is too vague for us to really know what we are supposed to be doing.
- D. The relevant skills we will learn from working in groups have been made clear to us.

7. Overall Attitude

In this section you are invited to describe your present *overall attitude* to the idea of working in groups in your present program.

- A. Overall, I feel capable of ensuring that any group of which I am a member will be a personally effective learning experience.
- B. Overall, I feel motivated to be an active member of a learning group in this program.
- C. Overall, I consider that my current context provides me with the capacity to engage effectively in out of class group work.
- D. Overall, I feel happy with the prospect of working in learning groups in this program.

Group Readiness Questionnaire

Scoring Sheet

Please use these scales (from *not at all characteristic of you* to *very characteristic of you*) to indicate your rating of yourself on each statement. Do not be concerned if the numeric value of ratings is reversed from item to item. This simply reflects the wording of a statement. Rate all the statements before adding the totals for each section.

<p>1. Work Preference</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th colspan="2">Not at all</th> <th colspan="3">Moderately</th> <th colspan="2">Very</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Work Preference total score: _____</p>		Not at all		Moderately			Very		A.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	B.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	C.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<p>2. Previous History in Groups</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th colspan="2">Not at all</th> <th colspan="3">Moderately</th> <th colspan="2">Very</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Previous History total score: _____</p>		Not at all		Moderately			Very		A.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	B.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	C.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Not at all		Moderately			Very																																																																											
A.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
B.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
C.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
	Not at all		Moderately			Very																																																																											
A.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
B.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
C.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
<p>3. Independent Learning</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th colspan="2">Not at all</th> <th colspan="3">Moderately</th> <th colspan="2">Very</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Self-Managed Learning total score: _____</p>		Not at all		Moderately			Very		A.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	B.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	C.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<p>4. Self-Efficacy in Groups</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th colspan="2">Not at all</th> <th colspan="3">Moderately</th> <th colspan="2">Very</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Self-Efficacy in groups total score: _____</p>		Not at all		Moderately			Very		A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	B.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	C.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	D.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
	Not at all		Moderately			Very																																																																											
A.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
B.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
C.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
	Not at all		Moderately			Very																																																																											
A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
B.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
C.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
D.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
<p>5. Resource Availability</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th colspan="2">Not at all</th> <th colspan="3">Moderately</th> <th colspan="2">Very</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Resource Availability total score: _____</p>		Not at all		Moderately			Very		A.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	B.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	C.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<p>6. Meaningful Context</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th colspan="2">Not at all</th> <th colspan="3">Moderately</th> <th colspan="2">Very</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C.</td> <td>7</td><td>6</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Meaningful Context total score: _____</p>		Not at all		Moderately			Very		A.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	B.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	C.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Not at all		Moderately			Very																																																																											
A.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
B.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
C.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
	Not at all		Moderately			Very																																																																											
A.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
B.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
C.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1																																																																										
D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
<p>1. Overall Attitude to Group Work</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tbody> <tr> <td>A.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D.</td> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Overall Attitude total score : _____</p>	A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	B.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	C.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<p>General Background Information</p> <p>What is your year of study? 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>What is your age? _____</p> <p>What is your gender? Male Female</p>																																																
A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
B.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
C.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										
D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7																																																																										

Section 2: Understanding your Group Readiness Profile

Step 1. Forming your profile: *What is my group readiness profile?*

A number of personal and situational factors have been shown to influence how willing or able people are to engage in groups. We invited you to assess yourself on some of these factors in Section 1 of this exercise.

You can gain a sense of your “group readiness profile” by translating your factor totals to the diagram below (Figure 1). Please *shade each of the segments* in accord with your self rated totals on each of the group readiness dimensions. Generally speaking, the more shaded a segment the more you consider a factor to be a positive influence on your readiness to participate in groups.

The outer shaded *spoke pattern* of the wheel indicates your current assessment of the factors that influence how you feel about working in groups. The inner shaded area of the *wheel hub* indicates your assessment of your current overall attitude to working in groups. Together these constitute your self-assessed *group readiness profile*.

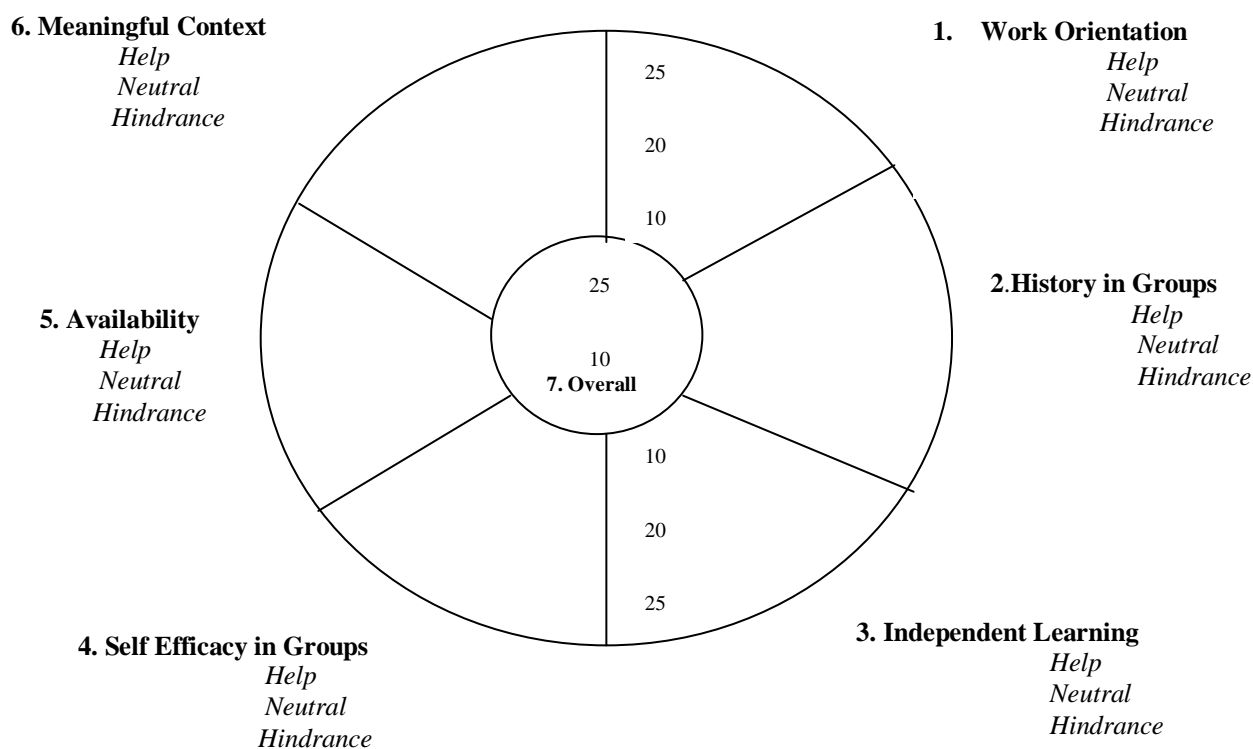


Figure 1: Group Readiness Profile

Step 2. Interpreting your profile: *What does my profile mean?*

The next step is to understand how each factor works for you. A brief description of each of the factors is provided in Table 1 on page 9. *Read these descriptions* and relate them to your current attitudes.

You may also find it useful after you have read each description to get a sense of whether each factor is likely to be currently *helping or hindering* your readiness to engage productively in group based learning activities. There isn't an actual numerical cut off which indicates whether you think your current score or position may be a help or hindrance to you effectively working in groups. This is a matter for your personal judgement. Circle the appropriate word on the diagram (help, neutral or hindrance) to summarise your judgement of the likely influence of each factor on your group readiness.

Reflection Guidelines: Please *do not* consider your self-ratings on these factors as providing a definitive description of your attitude to working in groups. If your judgement says something different to the profile then trust your judgement. Remember as well that none of these factors are fixed- your attitudes can vary from group to group and involve learnable skills and behaviours. Also try not to over-interpret your profile, it can at best only provide general indications.

Discussion Guidelines: If you are doing this exercise as part of a group, you may at this point want to compare notes with your colleagues. The aim of this initial group discussion is *not* to find the best profile or to move everyone to the same level of engagement. Rather this is an opportunity to *share your understanding* of your own starting position and to *seek to understand* and appreciate other members' positions. Each of you will have a unique story and attitude. There isn't a correct level of engagement to be achieved. The task is to simply openly discuss "how it is" for each of you at this point in time.

If you are undertaking this exercise as a member of a newly, or about to be formed, learning group, then the **Team Profile** (Appendix 1) may provide a useful means of summarising information from step 2. This will enable a more focused discussion and the understanding of the readiness of not only individuals, but also your group as a whole.

Learning Summary

As a summary of Step 2 record two useful learnings or insights so far from this process.

One useful thing I have learnt about my own attitude to working in groups is:

One useful thing I have learnt about others attitudes to working in groups is:

Step 3. Acting on the Information: *What might I want to do about this?*

In the preceding step you will have developed an understanding of key “readiness factors” and how each might influence your ability, willingness and capacity to participate in group based activities. This next step involves *putting this understanding into action*. Group readiness is a learnable skill!

We have provided an outline of some of the *implications of higher and lower scores* on each of the factors. (See Table 2 on page 11). This is intended to help you think about applying this information to your membership of current or future groups. *Read these* and get a sense of which ideas may be particularly useful to you. *Place a tick* besides those that “strike a chord” with you.

Reflection Guidelines: In reflecting on the practical implications of your readiness profile don’t just focus on your “lower scoring factors”. You will see that there are *positive things* we can do to not only help ourselves but also others in our “higher scoring” areas of readiness. Remember our ultimate task is to be not only engaged ourselves but also to help others engage.

Discussion Guidelines: If you are doing this exercise as part of a group, you may wish to discuss the value of different suggestions. Help each other find at least one or two practical ways to enhance their readiness to work in groups. Consider starting the discussion by giving each other permission to go beyond “comfortable chatting” to *constructive challenge*”.

Action Summary

As a summary of Step 3 record two ideas that you intend to use when next working in groups:

One thing I can do to help myself is:

One thing I can do to help others is:

Impact Check

As a final integrating step, assess the impact this process has had on your readiness to work in groups. If you are working with other people briefly discuss your “impact assessment” with each other.

*I am a lot
less ready*

*I am
less ready*

*I am about as
ready as I was
before*

*I am
more ready*

*I am a lot
more ready*

Table 1: Brief Description of Group Readiness Factors

Read these factor descriptions to develop your understanding of the likely influences on your willingness, ability and capacity to effectively engage in groupwork.

How willing am I to participate in group-based learning activities?

1. Work Preference

Your self-ratings for preference for style of working can be understood as an interpersonal continuum ranging from *individualism* (a preference for independent activity or working as an individual) to *collectivism* (a preference for working with others or interactive activity). Generally speaking, you can think of this as a way of describing the extent to which people like to work alone (a lower score) or work with others (a higher score). Both are valid styles and one is not necessarily better than the other. If you have a preference towards a collectivist style of working you may find that you are more interested in group based learning activities.

2. Previous Group Experience

Our previous history as a member of groups, in particular whether or not they have been satisfying or productive experiences will influence our attitude to future group participation. If we have had some “less than positive” team experiences (eg. difficult interactions with people, poor task outcomes) this may colour how we feel about the present experience. People will bring their different histories to the present group and it can be useful to compare notes and clear the air. A higher score indicates a more positive attitude to your previous group experiences and a lower score indicates you may have more negative memories of working with others in similar circumstances. If you have had positive past experiences you may be more willing to engage in groupwork in the future.

How able do I feel participating in group-based learning activities?

3. Group Skills

How competent people feel in contributing to, or facilitating groups, influences their attitude to engaging in group based methods of working or learning. It is a commonsense idea that the more competent we feel about a task the more likely we are to regard it in a positive way. If we feel we can successfully do something then we are more likely to “give it a go”. Alternatively, if we feel we are “not up to it” then we may be less enthusiastic. People generally report a higher level of efficacy as a group member if they have a sense of themselves as possessing the types of skills that contribute to groups being effective (eg. bringing peoples’ ideas together, being aware of processes and interactions between people, facilitating communication between people, being an active contributor). A higher score indicates that you feel relatively able as a group member and a lower score that you feel less able in group situations.

4. Independent Learning

Because this is not just a group experience, but actually a “self-managed group experience,” the extent to which members feel capable of learning independently will have a bearing on how they feel about managing their own group with minimal outside assistance. Self-managed or independent learning refers to the confidence you have in yourself as a learner to work and learn without the close supervision of an expert or teacher. Independent learning skills include being able to set and achieve learning goals, be persistent in the face of difficulties, manage distractions that might get in the way of the learning task, and adapting to the requirements of different learning situations. A higher score indicates that you feel able to

independently manage your learning activities and a lower score indicates that you feel less confident about successfully managing on your own.

What capacity do I have to participate in group-based learning activities?

5. Time Availability

Working collaboratively takes time and effort. The extent to which members feel that they are “time poor” because of the competing priorities of life and study may influence the extent to which they are willing to invest in such an activity. Members varying investments in the group are often the sources of conflict about inequity of contribution and differing standards of work. A higher score indicates that you feel that you have the time available to do out of class group tasks and a lower score indicates that you have concerns about your capacity to undertake such activities successfully.

6. Meaningful Context

If the task at hand is vague or not well explained then it is less likely that people will find it meaningful or engaging. Peoples’ motivation depends on whether they understand what is required of them and the extent to which they believe the required activities will be of value or benefit to them. It is not always readily apparent how the activity of “working in groups” will lead to useful learning outcomes for those involved. (eg. “How will this be useful to me now as a student, and later when I am employed?”) Sometimes it can feel like students are “just doing” group-based activities rather than “doing them for a reason”. The academic context in which groupwork is being undertaken (particularly whether the exercise makes sense) can have a significant impact on students’ capacity to engage in the task at hand. A higher score indicates that you feel you have clear and meaningful reasons for working in groups and a lower score indicates that you need better explanations of its value and purpose.

Table 2: Reflecting on the Implications of our Readiness Profiles

Read these descriptions to better understand the practical steps you can take given your current group readiness profile.

1. Work Orientation

If your self score on this scale tends towards the *higher range* (a general preference for working with others) your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Remember that not everyone may share your initial level of enthusiasm for this type of activity. People may need time and reassurance “to get on board” the experience.
- Are aware of the need to “give people space”-others may need more individual thinking time than you.

If your self score on this scale tends towards the *lower range* (a general preference for working as an individual) then your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Are aware that participating in the group, given that it is not your preferred style, may require you to invest “extra effort.” Try not to resent this required investment.
- Monitor the temptation to opt for your “default style” of working alone if things get difficult or complicated in the group.

If your self-score is in the *mid-range* (no clear preference either way) you might consider whether specific aspects from either of the above poles might assist you to become a more effective group member.

2. Previous Experience

If your self-score on this scale tends towards the *upper-range* (a positive attitude to previous group experiences) then your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Are sensitive that others may have had difficult group experiences. Seek to understand the types of negative behaviours others have found difficult to manage.
- Resist the temptation to “sell” group work to others with less positive experiences than you.

If your self-score on this scale tends towards the *lower-range* (a negative attitude to previous group experiences) then your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Clarify the particular issues (eg inequity in contributions, unreliability, dominating behaviour, fuzzy outcomes or procedures) that have previously been most concerning for you. Identify what might be done to prevent or minimise these in future.
- Be aware that you may be “over generalising” from a previous negative group experience to all future group experiences. Monitor any potential fear and/or cynicism.

If your self-score is in the *mid-range* (no clear preference either way) you might consider whether specific aspects from either of the above poles might assist you to become a more effective group member.

3. Independent Learning

If your self-score on this scale tends towards the *upper-range* (a sense of confidence as an independent learner) then your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Be aware that you are contributing to a group learning process-not just managing your own learning agendas. Accommodate others' needs and preferences for structure to support their learning.
- Don't judge others as "less mature learners" simply because they see themselves as less independent. People bring a range of skills and abilities to this group exercise.

If your self-score on this scale tends towards the *lower-range* (less confidence as an independent learner) then your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Pay attention to the self-management requirements of this type of activity (eg, getting organised without being supervised, managing to do out of class/meeting activities, persisting when things get difficult).
- Try not to be thrown by the increased expectations of independence. It's okay to put group structures in place (eg meeting procedures) and to check progress with staff about how you are going.

If your self-score is in the *mid-range* (no clear preference either way) you might consider whether specific aspects from either of the above poles might assist you to become a more effective group member.

4. Group Skills

If your self-score on this scale tends towards the *upper-range* (a sense of confidence as a member of a group) then your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Are prepared to take a more active role at the beginning of the group to help get things started. However, in doing this, resist the temptation to think that "it is all up to you" or that you have to be the group leader.
- Use your skills or confidence not to take over but to encourage other members to contribute to or influence proceedings. Work towards shared leadership.

If your self-score on this scale tends towards the *lower-range* (less confidence as a member of a group) then your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Remember that while you may not feel particularly confident, the skills required to make a group work effectively can be reduced to two essentials: genuinely listen to others and clearly say what you think. Focus on putting these basics into action.
- Take responsibility for getting involved-don't wait to be asked. Place a value on your contribution.

If your self-score is in the *mid-range* (no clear preference either way) you might consider whether specific aspects from either of the above poles might assist you to be a more effective group member.

5. Availability

If your self-score on this scale tends towards the *upper-range* (a sense that you have sufficient time available for study) then your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Be sensitive that others may have more time pressures than you when discussing issues of commitment to a group task. Resist the temptation to judge others reduced availability as a lack of motivation or interest in study.
- Seek to have an open and frank discussion about peoples' circumstances and constraints and negotiate an agreed fair level of commitment to the group activity. A shared idea of "what is fair to expect from each other" can help prevent later misunderstanding.

If your self-score on this scale tends towards the *lower-range* (a sense that you have less time available for study than may be desirable) then your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Try to establish what time and energy the group task will require you to invest. Work out what level of commitment is required to "do it justice" rather than to "just get by". Remember others outcomes may depend on you capacity to undertake the task. Be honest with yourself as to whether "low availability" is another way of saying "low interest" in the group task.
- Seek to have an open and frank discussion with others about how to approach the task efficiently (ie. not selling it short but rather sorting out how to achieve the outcomes in a time efficient fashion). Be sensitive that other people may have more time to go deeper or to do more with the group task. Resist the temptation to talk them out of this simply so that you don't feel guilty or embarrassed.

If your self-score is in the *mid-range* (no clear preference either way) you might consider whether specific aspects from either of the above poles might assist you to be a more effective group member.

6. Meaningful Context

If your self-score on this scale tends towards the *upper-range* (a sense that the rationale for working in groups is clear and meaningful for you) then your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Share your understanding with others who may be less clear. But listen to what they have to say first.
- Are sensitive to the fact that others may not feel as clear about the purpose and value of group based exercises. Resist the temptation to judge others (eg "Don't you get it?") or over-sell the idea.

If your self-score on this scale tends towards the *lower-range* (a sense that the rationale for working in groups is less clear and meaningful for you) then your effectiveness as a group member may be improved if you:

- Are not afraid to say, "I don't get it!" Resist the temptation to sit on your hands and think "If you haven't explained it to me, I'm not going to ask!"
- Raise your concerns with staff. Ask the questions that might give you the information you need as to why these types of group based activities may be valuable.

If your self-score is in the *mid-range* (no clear preference either way) you might consider whether specific aspects from either of the above poles might assist you to be a more effective group member.

APPENDIX 1: TEAM READINESS PROFILE WORKSHEET

Overview

This worksheet may be used if you are undertaking this exercise as part of a newly formed group. You are invited to consider your group profile in terms of the range of attitudes members bring to the idea of “working in groups”. The aim is to understand your *team’s pattern* as a whole not the attitudes of individual members. You are seeking to develop between you a shared understanding of the attitudes each of you bring to the group and the implications of this for how your group will work.

The Team Readiness Matrix (Table 3, below) provides a simple way to summarise team members’ self-assessments of their readiness influencing factors. You may find it useful to transfer this matrix to a white board or a sheet of newsprint to provide the team with a single point of focus for discussion.

Instructions

1. Team members’ names are entered on the rows of the matrix.
2. Each team member enters a tick in the columns where they have decided they have a helpful attitude to working in groups (See Step 2 of the overall process) and a cross in the columns where they feel they have a hindering attitude.
3. As a group discuss your *group pattern* using the following focus questions:
 - What is our overall pattern of readiness factors? In what areas do we seem to be reasonably ready and resourceful as a group? In what areas might we face some risks?
 - What might be some useful thing to consider doing now or in the near future that might facilitate us being “more ready” as a group?
 - Overall, are we “engaged and ready enough” to start the process of building this group?

Table 3: Team Readiness Matrix

Use a tick to indicate a *helping attitude* and a cross to indicate a *hindering attitude* for each influencing factor. Sum the team totals for each column.

	Members	Work Preference	History in Groups	Independent Learning	Group Skills	Availability	Meaning
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
	Total Helping						
	Total Hindering						

