

Group Work in Online Meetings – A Guide to Successful Digital Collaboration

When meeting virtually, such as by phone or video conference, it is especially important to discuss how you would like to work together. Our needs are as diverse as we are! Mutual understanding is a key determinant for successful group work and is especially important when things don't work out as planned and you need to find a solution together. When you're aware of others' strengths and qualities, it's easier to assign roles and tasks and provide everyone with an opportunity to do their best.

The following list is not exhaustive. We recommend using it as a basis to discuss and organize your digital group work. If you get stuck or are unable to solve a conflict, please contact your lecturer, the course organizer, [Course Guidance](#), or the [Academic Advising Service](#).

Preparation

- Set aside some time before your online meeting to prepare and make sure your headset/headphones, microphone, and camera are working
- Choose a neutral background. This both provides you with some privacy and prevents group members from being distracted by movement in the background.
- Adjust the brightness in the room so that your face is evenly lit and recognizable. This is particularly useful for team members with a hearing impairment as it allows them to read your mouth and follow along.
- Only turn on your microphone when speaking. Try to ensure a quiet environment without disruptive sounds (e.g. open window with birds singing, typing on the computer, loud notifications) so that others can hear you clearly when speaking.
- If you have a poor Internet connection, turn off your camera or join the meeting by phone.

Getting started

- At the beginning ask each participant about their individual needs, such as the need for everyone to speak slowly or for certain visual aids (for instance, if a student with a visual impairment is participating, they may need an explanation about what a picture or graphic is depicting)
- Agree on how participants should signal that they don't understand something or would like to speak (such as raising their hand, writing in the chat)
- Agree on how and what you would like to work on in your group/at each meeting
- Appoint a group leader for each meeting who is responsible for facilitating the meeting

- Also appoint someone to keep minutes and send them to the group afterwards
- If necessary, assign someone to monitor the chat and make sure contributions and questions from the chat are included in the conversation.

During the meeting

- If you are changing topics, this should be announced by whoever is speaking or the group leader.
- Wait until it is your turn to speak to turn on your microphone
- Let others finish speaking. Speaking over one another can make it difficult for participants with a hearing impairment to understand the conversation.
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Announce when the speaker changes ("I'm now handing it over to XY" or "It's XY speaking again")
- Look into the camera when speaking so that others can see your mouth and face. This is important for individuals with a hearing impairment who need to be able to read lips to communicate.
- If you are having difficulty understanding someone (due to a bad connection), have the group leader summarize what was said to ensure everyone understands. The same applies when members have joined by phone (difficult for hearing impaired students as they are unable to then read lips). → Do this each time, regardless of whether you feel what was said is relevant or not.
- Mute your microphone when you are finished speaking. This improves the sound quality for others and prevents possible distractions.
- Try and make sure everyone has the opportunity to speak at least once

Technische Universität Berlin | Academic Advising Service | Last updated: September 2021

Homepage: tu.berlin/studienberatung/athome

Email: studienberatung@tu-berlin.de