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# *Teachers' notes*

## **WORKING WITH OTHERS**

*Working with others* is becoming an increasingly important aspect of study. However, co-operative working skills are often taken for granted. This section aims to promote effective group work.

**Similarities and differences** is designed to raise awareness that each of us brings different experiences to a situation and it is these experiences that mould our attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. Discussion and comparison of past experiences help students become aware that working with other people involves recognising and respecting their identities and presentations of self. Further discussion could be based on the reasons why we need to learn to listen to others' viewpoints, as well as contributing our own, in order for group communication to be effective.

**Listening to others** starts from a broad perspective, encouraging students to think about why they listen to some people more than others. (Trust, respect and a willingness to balance what otherwise might be one's own very limited viewpoint.) Students are asked to think about situations when their contribution has not been listened to and how that made them feel. Ten school or college situations in which they are required to listen may include: *the fire alarm, in a lecture, to examination starting details, in a presentation, when people are taking it in turn to read, to safety instructions*. Hopefully they will also include '*when in a group discussion*'. The next activity asks the student to list ten ways which show they have listened. The suggestions here may include *nodding, taking notes, asking for a point to be extended, offering a different viewpoint, smiling, asking for a point to be clarified or for the source of the speaker's information*. If possible, emphasise the importance of being an active listener and how it feels to the speaker when they are receiving positive feedback.

**Analysing groups** focuses on self analysis within the group situation. Students are encouraged to be aware of the purpose and intended outcome of any group work as well as the importance of setting time targets for discussion. If a group decides that '*by 10.30 we will have a summary of our group differences*' they are more likely to keep on task.

**Roles in groups** asks students to think about what makes an effective group. They extend a list of roles that one might play within a group. The extension list might include: *someone who clarifies the ideas offered, group organiser, selector of main ideas and key points, outcome manager*. Students can also make a list of roles that people might play in order to ensure an *unsuccessful* group. For example, *opter out, displacement officer, off the point person, missed the point person, why am I here? person* and so on.

**Body language.** Controlling non-verbal communication is a key ingredient in working effectively with others across a range of situations. Here eye contact is used as an example and students are encouraged to consider both positive and negative non verbal communication. There is a wealth of opportunity for role play follow up activities with students using body language only to communicate moods, beliefs and feelings.

**Group dynamics** involves thinking about the complexity of the two-way channels involved in a small group of four and then six people. Prior to handing out the sheet it is useful to ask students to try and work out for themselves how many channels of communication there are in a group of four if every person is to communicate with each of the others in the group. Students could work in pairs and feed back their answers to the whole group. They are then asked to work out how many channels of communication there are in a group of six. (The answer is 30 two-way channels.) When considering the effectiveness of different group sizes students might think about teaching and learning situations, problem solving, learning a skill, being in a sports team. Discussion could centre on how and why groups really 'work'.

**Group work evaluation.** Students will benefit from reflecting on their own behaviour within a group and can use this as a basis for targeting areas for improvement. Alternatively the sheet could be filled in prior to participating in a number of group activities and the *before* and *after* results compared.

## SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Studying is not always an isolated individual activity, there are likely to be many occasions when you need to co-operate. In fact, learning is often most effective when shared. But working well with others requires skills, just like all aspects of study.

First of all you need to give everybody the respect they deserve, however different from you they appear to be.

Have you ever liked or disliked someone from the moment that you first met? It's all to do with the way a person presents themselves and your own prejudices and preconceptions.

To work well with others you need to recognise the similarities and differences that exist between you and them.

Complete these sentences:

When I meet new people I usually .....

When I don't understand something I .....

When I have a problem I usually .....

When I need someone to listen I .....

At school/college my personality is .....

At home my personality is .....

I am most happy when I am .....

I do not like it when I .....

If possible, compare your answers with a partner's. Discuss the differences.

But what about similarities?

Make a list of past experiences that are common to most students. For example, '*I went to school*'.

Now, list some experiences that are 'unique' to you.  
For example, *I am an only child*



As you can see, you're broadly similar to many other students as well as uniquely different!

# LISTENING TO OTHERS

Is anybody out there listening? It's important to feel that somebody is.

Who are you most likely to go to when you need someone to listen?

Which people are you most likely to talk to in the following situations? Choose from the list below. Add some more of your own if you wish.

Buying new clothes .....
Having a personal problem .....
Needing a shoulder to cry on .....
Changing hairstyle .....
Feeling stressed .....
Having problems with my studies .....
Sharing a secret .....
Feeling confused .....

Teacher	Grandparent	Friend	Brother
Sister	Father	Mother	Neighbour
Male friend	Female friend	Boy/Girlfriend	Other (specify)

You might have found that it's not always the obvious person that you take problems to. For example, you might take a study problem to an older brother rather than a tutor. Indeed you might take all the above problems to the same person because they listen well and make you feel better.

Have you ever been telling someone something important and found they suddenly walked off to do something else or even said 'What did you say?' as you had finished pouring your heart out?

People that take the time to *listen* show that they value you and consider you worth giving some time to – they care.

When we speak we expect people to listen rather than just hope that they do. Listening however is not a skill that we are always good at.

Write down ten college situations when you need to listen.

1.	.....
2.	.....
3.	.....
4.	.....
5.	.....
6.	.....
7.	.....
8.	.....
9.	.....
10.	.....

Was it difficult to think of ten situations? If so, perhaps it's because we don't often stop and think about listening – we accept that we 'just do it'.

One of the situations above could have been '*when I am working in a group during a lesson*'.

This is an important listening situation.

Think about a situation at college when you might need to communicate in a group. How could you show others in the group that you were listening to them? List as many ways as you can think.

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If you can, compare your list with another student's.

Do you use all these methods? How can you improve your listening skills?

# ANALYSING GROUPS

Working in groups is not easy so it's worth spending some time thinking about what creates effective group working and about how we behave in groups.

## Successful groups

Think of situations in the present or past when you have found group or team work useful and rewarding. It could be with a group of friends or in a club, organisation or team.

These successful group situations are likely to have had a **sense of purpose**. You need to know **why** you are in the group, **want** to be a part of it and have identified what group **outcome** is intended.

Groups put together for study purposes need to define these things at the start of their discussion.

Think of the last study group situation you took part in.

What was the purpose of the group and what was the intended outcome?

(If you can't remember easily, is it because you were, to put it politely, not an active member of the group?)

## Responsibilities of group members

Tick which of these you've ever done when put into a group situation to work - go on - be honest.

<p>I have talked about things other than the topic</p> <p>I have not offered any ideas</p> <p>I have found it a good opportunity to catch up on homework</p> <p>I let the others get on with it</p> <p>Anything else? .....</p>	
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Just think what would happen if each group member let the others get on with it ..... yes, it would be a quiet group if nothing else.

Everyone in a group needs to be actively involved for the group to be successful and for everyone to get the most out of it. Below is a list of some of the ways group members need to be actively involved.

Think of a recent occasion when you were asked to be work as part of a group and 'grade' yourself on each aspect, five being excellent and one being very poor.

	<b>Poor</b>				<b>Excellent</b>
Turn taking	1	2	3	4	5
Offering ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Extending others' ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Offering alternative ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Justifying comments	1	2	3	4	5
Respecting others' comments	1	2	3	4	5

Finally think of any group situation that you know of, or have been part of, that could be considered successful.

Write down five reasons for the success of the group. If possible, compare your observations with a fellow student.

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....

## ROLES IN GROUPS

Have you ever been in a group situation where no one knew what to say?  
 Have you ever been in a group situation where everyone had too much to say?  
 What about when one person does all the talking and doesn't give you a chance to say a word?

Other problems can arise if group members don't focus on their task. Unless each member of the group is 'on task' a discussion becomes a diversion!

Here is a task that a group was trying to focus on. Grade the comments below according to their relevance.

Task: *Should there be a pool table in the student common room?*

	not at all relevant			very relevant	
1. 'Many students would really enjoy that'	1	2	3	4	5
2. 'I think with so many students here we need two'	1	2	3	4	5
3. 'I don't play pool'	1	2	3	4	5
4. 'Whoever goes to the student common room?'	1	2	3	4	5
5. 'Yes, and a television and video'	1	2	3	4	5
6. 'Has anyone done the last essay?'	1	2	3	4	5

Do you recognise that sort of discussion? How could you possibly decide what the outcome of the discussion was? What went wrong?

One way of avoiding these situations is to make sure each group member is aware of the many roles they have to play in order to be part of an effective group.

Here are some group roles – add some more if you can and circle those you know you 'play' when involved in group discussion:

chairperson	note taker	initiator of ideas	developer of ideas
listener	summariser	evaluator	time manager
'keeping on task' manager	adviser	questioner	builder of ideas

Another way of avoiding group chaos is to get off to a good start by making clear how the group is going to work – setting out some basic rules.

Make a list of four basic rules that will help a group complete its task effectively.

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....

# BODY LANGUAGE IN GROUPS

It's estimated that we communicate a lot more through our bodies than our words. What silent messages do you give and receive?

Have you felt uncomfortable because someone is staring at you for example?

Staring is OK for museums and aquaria, but staring at a person reduces them to an object!

So what's the difference between staring and simply gaining eye contact?

Let's see what you think. Fill in the right hand column.

Action	This means:
You gain eye contact with someone speaking and nod	-----
You look right away from a speaker	-----
A speaker gains eye contact with you	-----
A speaker fixes her/his look at you	-----

Our eyes, together with the position of our body and the angle of our head, give feedback that indicates how we feel about ourselves, others and the situations we're in.

Think of the body language you might see in a classroom. List four examples which would give the impression of lack of interest, boredom and not caring about the work.

1. -----
2. -----
3. -----
4. -----

Now give four examples which give the impression of interest and enthusiasm

1. -----
2. -----
3. -----
4. -----

The way a room is laid out and your position in it can also communicate quite a lot.

A small group tutorial is taking place. The first two students arrive and choose where to sit. What impression is the tutor likely to get in each case and what might the two students be thinking?

<b>Tutor</b>	<b>Tutor</b>	<b>Tutor</b>																		
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Draw how the furniture could have been arranged in order to ensure that everyone felt 'equal' in the situation and was not faced with awkward decisions about where to sit.

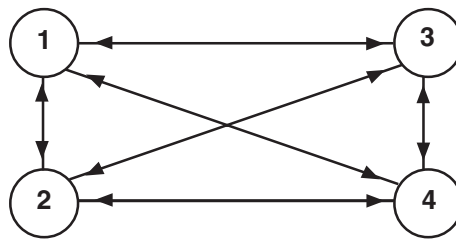
# GROUP DYNAMICS

Have you ever been in a group where you waited for your opportunity to contribute but it just never came?

It's really frustrating, especially when you know you had a really good idea to share.

If you understand the complexity of group sizes it explains quite a lot.

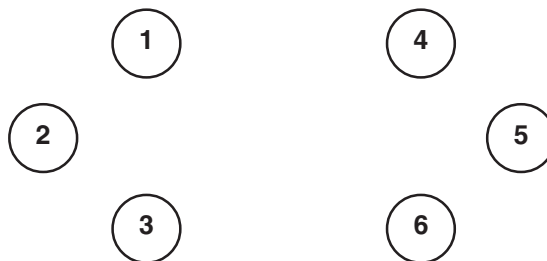
Within a successful group each member might reasonably be expected to listen and reply to each of the others, this is what happens in a group with four members:



How many two-way channels of communication can you count in this group of four? - - - - -

Now, here is a group of six people.

Work out how many two-way channels of communication there are here.



In a group of six there are - - - - - channels of two-way communication.

Now you can see why the larger a group is the harder it is for everyone to speak to each other.

Using your knowledge of group dynamics, think of some school or college situations where smaller or larger groups are most effective.

*small groups (2-9) most effective*

*large groups (10 and over) most effective*

# GROUP WORK EVALUATION

Think of the last time you were required to work in a group.

What was the group task? -----

Mark how effective you feel you were at these group skills.

	Totally unsuccessful				Totally successful
Keeping awake	1	2	3	4	5
Supporting other's views	1	2	3	4	5
Turn taking	1	2	3	4	5
Offering a different view	1	2	3	4	5
Extending ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Keeping on task	1	2	3	4	5
Listening to others	1	2	3	4	5
Respecting other's views	1	2	3	4	5
What other skills did you use?					
-----	1	2	3	4	5
-----	1	2	3	4	5
Now evaluate the success of the group itself					
Time management	1	2	3	4	5
Allocation of roles	1	2	3	4	5
Organisation	1	2	3	4	5
Keeping on task	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of outcome	1	2	3	4	5

Explain how you think the quality of the group work could have been improved.