

Ground rules

The natural differences that people tend to have can cause problems later if the group haven't talked about it at the start. For this reason it is a very good idea to set out your own ground rules.

Generally these come under two main headings:

- Rules about personal conduct
- Rules about working practice

Personal conduct

These are agreed expectations that the group has about how each member will behave. They usually cover things like:

- treating people with respect,
- encouraging participation,
- being polite and understanding,
- being reliable and honest.

Working Practice

These are agreed expectations about how the group will work. There are a number of things to consider here:

- Will there be a team leader and/or other roles.
- When, where and for how long will the group meet?
- How will meetings run?
- How should the group stay in contact?
- What should someone do if they cannot attend a meeting or complete work on time?
- How will you decide things?
- What if there is disagreement?
- What if someone falls unwell?

Consequences

A key aspect of establishing rules is to agree what will happen if the rules are broken. Often a group will decide that a discussion at the next meeting, followed by a written warning stating the rule that has been broken and the implication of this is the best action. Ultimately, you may decide to inform the tutor or even expel someone from the group for non-participation. You should check your tutor's guidelines for this though.

It is also a good idea to get everyone to sign to say that they agree with the ground rules. This can serve as a contract to protect against disagreement later.

