

Section 5: Group Management

If you have received a “Not Yet” in the Group Management Section, you have somehow been perceived as “getting in the way.” Are you slowing the group down because you love the sound of your own voice? Are you ignoring details and doing a job that lacks precision just because you want to “get it over with”? Are you so passive that you appear to be uninterested and irresponsible? Any time a group of people gets together to accomplish a specific task, it is important that each person takes an active role in organizing and pacing the work for the best possible results. Here are some tips.

OBJECTIVE: You help the group get organized.

This must be done in the very first minutes of a group’s first meeting, so don’t hang back. If your identified weakness is in organization, try the following tactics, which all involve meeting your weakness head-on.

1. Getting involved in task clarification is a good way to ease into group management. Here is a non-threatening task, but an extremely important one: volunteer to be in charge of getting the group’s assignment written down precisely. And do write the instructions exactly as given. A “small change” can make a huge difference: you may inadvertently increase the work load or even have the group do the wrong task entirely. Clear up any confusion by checking with the teacher before your group gets down to work.
2. Suggest that the group begin the work period by volunteering for specific roles. Begin by offering to be monitor, recorder, reporter or even leader--if you feel you have the confidence to do the job. Sometimes just getting the “housekeeping details” begun will stimulate activity. You may find the organizational checklists found on pages 30 and 31 extremely helpful.
3. Suggest that the group develop a timeline for the assignment. You may suggest that as a group, you spend the first few minutes of your first meeting planning how the assignment can be done in the allotted time. This will help not only you, but the entire group.

Here is a skeleton plan you can offer to the group:

- a. Consult the monthly calendar (or use an agenda book). Enter the assignment due date. Decide on a group due date *prior* to that teacher-imposed deadline. Leave yourself at least two days of “flex time” to handle any unforeseen problems. (And you can count on there being some!)

- b. Make a weekly assignment plan. (Use an agenda book for this.) How much class time will you have? Enter this amount. Estimate how much outside-of-class time will probably be required, erring on the side of more time than you think. Arrange mutually agreeable meeting times for either the entire group or for subgroups and have everyone enter these in their agenda books. These meetings are now the highest priority, meaning that you cannot accept babysitting jobs, work hours or dinner dates for during those times.

HINT: Your first meeting should take place as soon as humanly possible. Get into the work immediately.

- c. Each group member makes his/her own “To Do List.” Filling in the organizational checklist (See page 30.) should be very helpful as well.

Here is a sample timeline.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3 40 min. in class	4 40 min. in class	5 4 p.m. Caf.	6	7
8 3 p.m. Lib.	9 D slot Lib.	10 7 p.m. John's house	11 40 min. in class	12	13	14
15 3 p.m. Lib.	16	17 7 p.m. Terry's house	18 We finish	19 40 min. in class	20	21
22	23 Project Due	24	25	26	27	28

My TO DO List

- get ... for Wednesday
 - read . . . by Thursday
 - interview . . . Monday
 - research . . . Sunday
4. Suggest a “job jar” approach to the assignment. This involves dividing the assignment into subtasks, which are then written on slips of paper and kept in a jar or envelope. When a group member finishes a task, he/she draws from the jar. There is an element of fun in this random selection process that might appeal to your group. However, the group monitor and the entire group must be vigilant to ensure that everyone is doing his or her fair share of the jobs. Keep track of who did what job by writing the doer’s name on the job slip, for example.
 5. If the assignment is to be completed in one session, organization is even more important. Your group must get down to business immediately, and there can be no time wasting. A checklist is a good way to focus the group and organize for an effective use of limited time. If you are weak in organizational skills, volunteer to be in charge of filling out the checklist.

OBJECTIVE: You accept responsibility.

Do you think you were given a “Not Yet” in your Group Management Section because of one or several of the following reasons?

- a. You often forget to bring the necessary materials to group meetings.
- b. You forget to attend meetings outside of class time.
- c. You forget to do your assigned tasks and therefore let the rest of the group down.

If this sounds like you, you need to develop ways of breaking this pattern. Here are some ideas.

Strategies to Accept Responsibility

1. For a start, you could try the old standby of tying a string around your finger, but that is only one suggestion for jogging your memory. Here are some others.
 - Having a “Take-It-With-You” receptacle by the door at home is helpful. If, for example, you promised to bring a special item for a presentation, but are worried you might forget it, as soon as you get home, put the item in a special basket or bag by the door. If you have to trip on it to leave the house, then the chances are good that you won’t forget it!
 - Tie your coat sleeve in a knot so that in the morning you’ll see the knot and remember why you tied it.
 - Put a sticky note on your lunch kit or on the cover of your agenda book or on the telephone or on the fridge door—some place where you are bound to see it before you leave in the morning.
 - You could ask another group member to phone you to remind you in the morning.

You could even do all of the above, if necessary. As soon as your memory has been twiggled, do whatever it is you are supposed to do. If you put it off, the reminder becomes null and void! Whatever it takes, you must develop tactics for breaking that “I forgot” pattern that leaves both you and your group in the lurch.

2. Another way to develop more responsibility is to buddy up with someone who will be a good influence on you. Too often students pair up with partners who have similar weaknesses, or with friends who lead them astray. Instead, ask a peer in your group whose strengths you admire to work with you. As you work together, observe and take note of that peer’s tactics and strategies and imitate them.
3. Your problem may be linked to an inability to establish priorities. Do you find yourself constantly “flying by the seat of your pants,” rushing from one job to the next, and never giving anything your full and uninterrupted attention? Time management experts say that 80% of one’s payoffs derive from 20% of one’s activities. Clearly some activities have a higher payoff than others and should be high on your priority list. You may think that the other things you do are

not time wasters. For example, it may be a great idea to recopy your biology notes or clean your room. If, however, these noble tasks keep you from doing the work you promised the group you'd do, even they can be considered time wasters. Instead of taking a random approach to a list of tasks facing you, try the following grid exercise.

- a. Make a list of everything you have to do.
- b. Draw the following grid on a large sheet of paper.

	LOW PAYOFF	HIGH PAYOFF
LOW EFFORT	1	2
BIG EFFORT	3	4

- c. Sort your tasks. Put each into one of the four quadrants, using the following guidelines:
 - Quadrant 1: Tasks that are easy to do, but have a low payoff.
 - Quadrant 2: Tasks that are easy to do, but have a high payoff.
 - Quadrant 3: Tasks that are hard to do and have a low payoff.
 - Quadrant 4: Tasks that are hard to do and have high payoff.
- d. Cross off the tasks in Quadrant 3. They require a lot of effort with little return.
- e. Cross off the tasks in Quadrant 1.
- f. Do all the tasks in Quadrant 2 **now**. They are easy and have an immediate payoff. Some group work tasks will fall into this category.
- g. Develop a plan to complete the tasks in Quadrant 4. Major group projects fall into this quadrant. They require significant, organized effort, but are worth major marks.

4. If the reason you do not take on your fair share of responsibility in the group is that you suffer from “terminal shyness” or severe “stage fright,” there is no need to just accept this state of affairs. The experts in the student services department of your school can help. You may also find some helpful hints in Section 4 of this learner guide, which deals with communicating. There are tried and true ways to manage your shyness.

OBJECTIVE:
You help the group's pace;
you keep the discussion moving.

Are you getting “Not Yets” in your evaluations because you slow the group down? If time is limited and you cannot move at a lively pace, the group will be hindered.

If you are a stickler for detail to the point that group deadlines are not being met, you should consider doing some self-monitoring. You need to concentrate on being selective in your comments. For example, limit yourself to one “supplementary” question or statement per speaker. Remind yourself with a checkmark in the margin each time you elaborate on something already said. Consciously try to decrease the number of times you do this by counting those checkmarks.

If you have a problem with time management, one of the best ways to deal with this is to be proactive, that is, to act now rather than panicking later.

- Volunteer to be the monitor, the person in charge of the timeline or the job jar or the checklist. In other words, at each meeting, you are the person who polls the members to ensure that progress deadlines are being met. This will force you to be conscious of the fact that time is marching on. Decide ahead of time when your checks will be made. (It could be at the beginning, middle and end of the meeting, or every half hour, or as each task is completed, or at 3:45 p.m. each day.) If someone is falling behind, the group should then be able to deal with the problem effectively **before** the assignment deadline. Note: At first you may have to concentrate on doing only that job, cutting back on the number of other contributions you make.

If you have no ideas and the rest of the group is also stuck, try this:

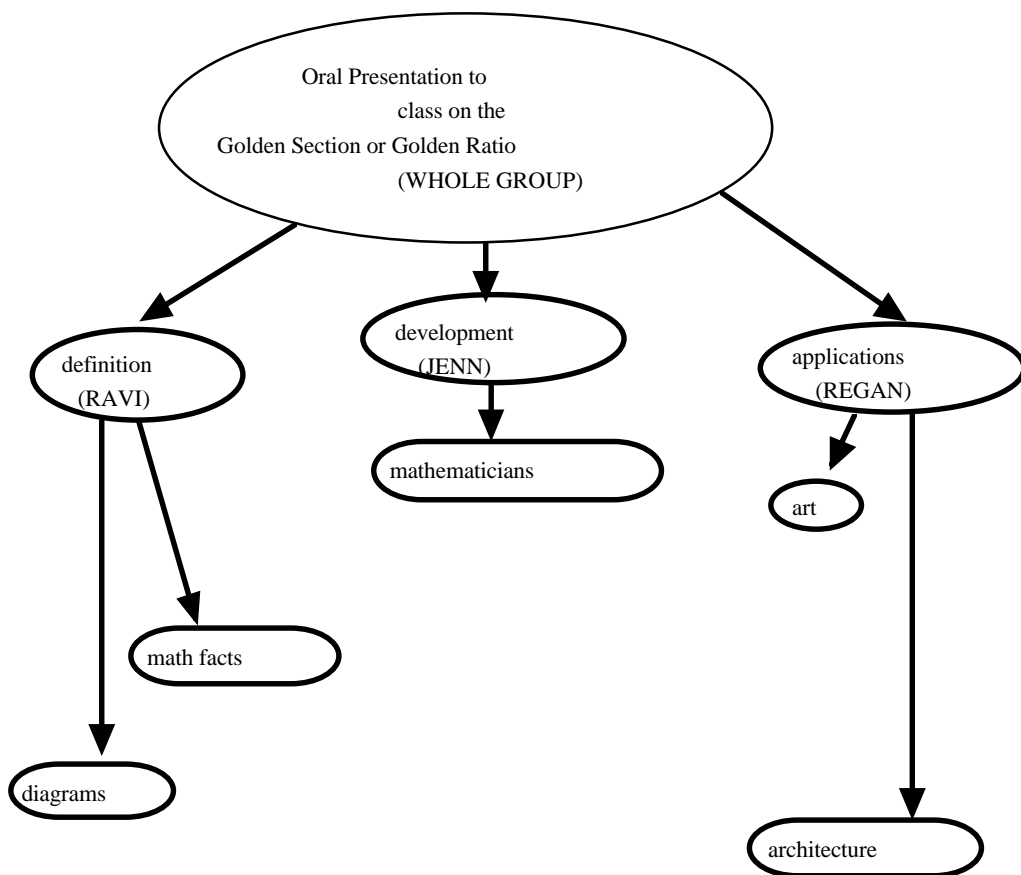
- Review the task: read it aloud. Often just getting back to basics will lead to new ideas or to a realization that the group has gone slightly off course in its discussions.

If you tend to hang back and let others take the initiative, you are probably not making as large a contribution as you could. If the group is having trouble getting down to business, try the following tactics:

- Read the assignment out loud and suggest a “go around” where each group member makes an uninterrupted statement. This could

be a comment on the intent of the task, an answer or partial answer to the question, a question, even an expression of confusion.

- Visualize. Diagram or map out the task. Write the task at the top, then create a flowchart “pod” for each subsection that must be covered or explored. Leave space for a name if you plan to divide the jobs among group members. Here is an example:



OBJECTIVE:
You track, encourage and/or evaluate the group’s progress.

If your problem is in this realm, it could be because you tend to dissociate from the group, let your attention wander, or accept a passive role. Try the following tactics.

Strategies to Track, Encourage and/or Evaluate the Group's Progress

- Before you go to class or attend a group meeting, get ready mentally. If you take a while to get settled and focussed, you will probably end up missing the first few important points. Speakers, whether they be teachers or group leaders, usually announce the task and the required approach immediately. Make a point of being ready before the speaker starts talking.
- Avoid sitting next to friends. They will distract you, even if they are not trying to. Whispering, off-topic side conversations, eye contact, and note passing will all get you a very quick “Not Yet” in your evaluation.
- Sit close to the teacher's desk. Being in a conspicuous place forces you to stay alert and on task. You are also in a better position to hear any instructions. Studies have shown that, all other things being equal, students who sit close to the teacher get better grades.

If your weakness lies in tracking the group's progress, volunteer to be in charge of just that. Before the group begins, have everyone plan how much time will be spent on each task. Ask to be the monitor, the person in charge of the clock. On the organizational checklist given on page 30 or in the margins of the assignment handout or on the group flowchart you have created, write in the approximate time of arrival at each subtask. Politely remind the group of approaching time limits, but be firm. Some useful phrases for tracking progress and encouraging increased speed or effort are the following:

- “It's 2 o'clock. Where did we say we should be . . . ?”
- “How are we doing? Do you think we have enough on this part of the assignment because we're just about at the end of the time we allotted for it.”
- “We've spent a lot of time on Number 1 because it was harder than we thought. What about moving on to Number 2 and coming back to 1 later?”
- “Let's do Number 4 while we're fresh and save Number 3 for the end of the meeting because it'll be easier and kind of fun.”

- “Hey, guys, there’s only about 10 minutes left. Maybe we should work extra hard for those last few minutes and then we won’t have to divvy it up for homework. How about if I start . . .”
- “We did it. We’ve finished on time. Let’s celebrate by . . .”

People who are good at tracking or monitoring group progress do the following:

- a. They read the assignment or subtasks aloud and ask questions like:
 - “Have we finished Number 1?”
 - “Are we just about ready to tackle the next question?”
 - “Great, let’s move on to Number 5 now.”
 - “We have about 10 minutes left. Should we go back to the assignment sheet and check to make sure everything’s been done?”
- b. They have a checklist of tasks to be done and draw attention to the tasks that are not yet complete by asking such questions as the following:
 - “Hey, guys, I believe we left out Number 3d. How about we get to that now?”
 - “Can someone find a quote for Number 4? That’s all we have left to do.”
- c. They summarize by saying things like:
 - “Here’s what I’ve heard us agree to. Is that right? Where to now?”
- d. They read back what has been noted so far in an effort to draw out further ideas. They say something like:
 - “Here’s what we’ve got so far. Anybody have more . . . ?”

- e. They suggest that further information be sought. They may say something like:
 - “Do you think we need more for Section B? I’ll bet Mr. X will not accept such a short answer.”
- f. They break up subgroups or cliques because they know that these cliques are counter-productive. They use such tactics as sitting between the clique members, asking directed questions to draw them back to the task at hand, and asking the worst offender to take notes for the meeting. They do whatever works but does not forever alienate the clique.

If you tend to be negative with other people, your group’s progress can definitely be impeded. No one likes to contribute if he/she risks being sneered at or ignored. If your peers say you are negative or passive to the point that it is detrimental to the group, you should learn how to become an **encourager**.

Strategies to Become an Encourager

Encouragers have the following characteristics.

- a. They use people’s names, not just the generic “you” or “he/she.” (They’ll say things like, “Sam, what do you think?” rather than “What do you over there think?”)
- b. They use the attending body language (SCOLER), as described below.
 - S = Square yourself to face the speaker.
 - C = Concentrate fully; don’t look around or play with your pen.
 - O = Open posture: Arms and legs uncrossed; hands open.
 - L = Lean forward slightly.
 - E = Eye contact: offer it but don’t demand it. Avoid staring.
 - R = Relax.
- c. They use “minimal encouragers,” which are brief gestures or comments that do not interrupt the speaker. For example, they use positive eye contact, nods, murmurs as opposed to jumping in with “encouragement,” which really amounts to an interruption or hogging of air time.
- d. They do not interrupt.

- e. They are “friendly helpers” when appropriate. (If you tend to be the “tough battler” of the group, aim for a role reversal. Adopt the friendly helper role at least twice at your next group meeting. Plan your script ahead of time. You can bail someone out if they’ve made a “dumb” or off-topic comment. You could say, for example, “I think that’s an interesting idea we should pursue later. For now, why don’t we . . .”)
- f. They compliment others for the contributions they make.
- g. They avoid making judgmental phrases and using sarcastic humour.
- h. They invite participation from others in non-aggressive ways. They may ask a group member, “Is there anything we’ve missed? Would you like to add to what Fred has just said?”

To summarize, encouragers show **empathy** for others in the group. Here are some empathic phrases you can use in your efforts to be more positive and encouraging:

- “It sounds like you think/feel/believe . . .”
- “So you feel . . .”
- “From your point of view, then, . . .”
- “So what you mean is . . .”
- “Could it be that . . .”
- “Correct me if I’m wrong, but . . .”
- “I’m not sure if I’m with you; do you mean that . . .”
- “Maybe I’m out to lunch, but . . .”

OBJECTIVE:

You help the group get tasks completed on time.

Efficient people, people who meet deadlines, do some or all of the following things:

- They break large tasks down into small, manageable steps.
- They concentrate on one task at a time. They do not start several tasks and then flit from one to the other.
- They don’t waste time. *If you spend entire “spares” lounging in the hall or redecorating your locker, you need to rethink your priorities!*

- They use “waste time” wisely. For example, they do homework on the bus, read as they eat lunch, spend spare periods in the library. *(And no, this doesn't make you a nerd!)*
- They politely refuse invitations to socialize if it is time they've allocated to homework and there is work that needs to be done.
- They take short, timed breaks, not letting themselves get drawn into lengthy unproductive coffee klatsches.

If your group criticizes you for not helping to get tasks completed on time, the root problem could be passivity. Are you the type of person who is happy to let others do the planning and all the big jobs, while you do the minimal amount of work they “assign” you? This behaviour is bound to get you a “Not Yet” in your evaluation—possibly in several categories!

Are You a Daydreamer or a Doodler?

The first step to changing this pattern is to monitor yourself. As soon as you catch yourself wandering into “la la land,” put a checkmark in the margin of the work you are supposed to be doing. Each group session or class, make a concerted effort to lower the number of checkmarks. Be tougher and tougher on yourself until you can say that you've been “with it” for an entire group meeting. Then keep up the good work until it becomes your habit to pay attention.

Have You Been Diagnosed with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

If so, you may need assistance from the professionals in the school's resource department. They can help with practical coping strategies.

Are You Preoccupied with a Personal Problem?

Instead of stewing about it at times when you really cannot address the problem (like when you are supposed to be doing group work), try this tactic. Briefly write your worry about that personal problem on a “To Do List.” File it in your agenda book and be reassured that you can and will go back to it in your next spare moments.

Are You Too Sleepy to Take an Active Role?

If this is an habitual problem, you need to address your priorities. If outside jobs or leisure activities are rendering you unfit to perform properly in school, you clearly need to rethink your work-play-school schedule. You may wish to use the time use survey on page 16 of this learner guide to help you identify your problems.

Are You Too Shy to Take an Active Role?

Well, the good news is that you need not take charge in order to contribute to group management. You can do quietly useful things. From the list below, choose the ideas that suit you and gradually build up confidence.

- a. Be in charge of task clarification.
- b. Be monitor or keeper of the organizational checklist.
- c. Be recorder.

OBJECTIVE:

You act as leader, recorder or monitor when appropriate.

When is it appropriate to volunteer? To be fair, you should take turns despite the fact that some people are more comfortable with leadership roles than others. To enhance your personal development and prepare for the real world, you need to get some experience. Don't be the passive one who lets everyone else take the initiative: rehearse the offer if necessary, but do offer. Here are some specific tactics:

Strategies for Acting as a Leader

1. Volunteer to host a group meeting outside of school time in your home. When you are host you almost automatically take an active role in planning. You cannot be passive if you are the host. Make the most of the role by taking on a leadership role as well.
2. Volunteer to be the group leader or chairperson. This is a heavy responsibility, so volunteer only when you feel ready. Remember, leadership is optional in the evaluation form. As leader, you are forced to help the group get organized--that's your major function.

Here are some tips on running a good group meeting.

- a. Call the group to order immediately. Make sure there is no time wasted.
- b. Create an agenda. In other words, plan exactly what is to be accomplished at the meeting.
- c. Ask for volunteers to act as recorder, time monitor, or reporter if necessary.
- d. Get the task clarified in everyone's mind before opening the discussion.
- e. Begin with a "go around" or other ice breaker that ensures everyone's participation.
- f. Participate without dominating, and ensure tactfully that others do the same. Draw in the shy group members in a non-threatening way.
- g. Have closure to the meeting by agreeing on the next meeting time, making individual "To Do Lists," etc.

NOTE: Consulting and using one of the organizational checklists will help you run a smooth meeting.

3. Volunteer to be the group's recorder. You must be in tune with the meeting right from the start in order to do this job. Taking the notes will help you to focus on the task and on any gaps in information.
4. Volunteer to be the monitor, the person in charge of the checklist, timeline, or job jar. In other words, at each meeting, you are the person who ensures that progress deadlines are being met. This will force you to be conscious of time management. Be certain to check off each task as it is done.

General, All-Purpose Hint:

Observe a good role model. If there is a person in your group who is great at getting the group organized and who manages time

effectively, watch that person. Jot down notes as you answer the following questions:

- What words or phrases does this person use?
- In what order does he/she approach the task?
- How is delegation or sharing of the jobs done?

If you feel comfortable doing so, approach your role model and interview him/her about the skills you've observed. During the interview, ask the following questions and any others you can think of.

- Can you describe the thoughts and feelings you had during the group session?
- What conscious decisions did you make to facilitate the group work?

Try to emulate the good role model, using one or two borrowed tactics at a time. As you gain confidence, ask a trusted peer to observe you in action. Ask that person to take observational notes as you manage the group, putting into practice what you've learned. Debrief afterwards, making note of suggestions the observer offers. Another way to truly see yourself is to videotape a group meeting. Watch yourself in action and make note of areas that need improvement. And take heart. Gradually, the good behaviours you focus on developing will become habit, and you too will be an effective group manager.

Where do I go from here?

Challenge yourself. Get involved in groups both inside and outside of school. Do you have a favourite hobby or sport? Maybe you could get involved in a club or organization in your community or even start one up of your own. Volunteer to coordinate the group's activities. Is there a social issue that you feel needs to be addressed? Get a group together and mobilize. You will find that the more you get involved in group activities, the easier it becomes.

As this learner guide has shown, working well in group situations means working well with others. Practice the skills you have learned to deal with others as often as you can.

LEARNER GUIDE WRITING TEAMS

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Fundy High School
Grand Manan High School
John Caldwell School
Nackawic High School
Southern Victoria High School
St. Stephen High School
Sir James Dunn Academy
Tobique Valley High School
Woodstock High School

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