

Working in groups – some advice

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1 When the group project work starts

The starting premise is that the group (hereafter you) have agreed on a topic for your joint project. Before starting your work, I recommend that you agree on the following:

- Your internal internal rules for working together. This may include meeting on time and arriving prepared for meetings, the ordinary duration of meetings, and how to deal with situations if these internally agreed rules are broken.¹
- The ambition level for your group project. In some cases, the ambitions in terms of grade or what you want to achieve/learn from your group project may differ. How are you going to deal with these differences?
- A preliminary outline of your group term paper. As your work progresses, your outline may change. Be sure to agree on these changes so you all work in the same direction.
- A preliminary meeting schedule so you all can plan your term/semester. When setting this schedule each of you should check if there are any peak load work periods in other courses or you have other activities planned. Short and frequent meetings tend to work better than few and long meetings.
- Division of work. Most likely you have different strong and not so strong points. Some can be excellent at statistical analysis or mathematical modeling/algebra, while others are strong on theory or seeing your work in a broader context, or excellent making graphs/-figures. Try to allocate work such that each group member's strong sides are used in the most efficient way given your ambition level. Please remember:
 - as economists you are aware of the difference between absolute and comparative advantages when distributing your work, and
 - that you all benefit in the longer run if you learn from each other.
- Which platform you will be working on: Online sharing like Google docs or emails with files on individual PCs that you share. Irrespective of what you choose to do, read the short note [Working efficiently using modern word processors](#).
- A deadline for when a first complete version of your group term paper is to be complete. I suggest you set this deadline at least one to two weeks before delivery of the final term paper. This makes for a more coherent paper that logically hangs together and comes across as a group effort, not X individual contributions.

Exchange emails and mobile phone numbers to quickly be able to contact each other, and answer as quickly as possible when a group member contacts you.

(1) If your disagreements are such that you cannot resolve them internally, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am here to help.

2 Working on the contents of your paper

Use the teaching resources provided in the course you are writing the term in. This includes the text book, lectures and exercises, and possibly one or two short meetings with the course responsible. Finally, do not forget your fellow students for discussion and working together.

Most likely or hopefully you will learn more about what you plan to put in your paper. Share your insights/what you have learned with the other group members as it may influence their work as well. A short meeting may be an effective way to deal with this.

When reading something possibly related to your term paper, make a note of it with a proper reference. If these materials are found online, insert the link so you rapidly can find it again. Note that online materials should be referenced with an “accessed date”.

Use a common referencing tool like EndNote to ensure that references follow acknowledged standards and that all references in the text body of the term paper are listed in the references (and that materials not used are not referenced).

Some advantages with working online:

- It enables you to share your preliminary work with other group members, and your group colleagues to deliver feedback and comments on your work.
- You can share references, for example from EndNote and save each other from entering reference information multiple times.

If somebody runs into difficulties, informing the other group members early makes it easier to fix the problems.

Briefly summarized, stay connected with each other – this is your collective effort.

3 Finishing the group project

In the first section I suggested to plan for a one to two weeks period to make for a more coherent paper and to ensure that formalities are met, for example on references.

Please note that “self referencing” of *own unpublished materials*² is allowed. When in doubt, reference your work. Quotes must be referenced the following way: Put the quote in quotation marks and reference with publication (author(s) and year) and page numbers.

Spell check the entire text you submit – there is no excuse for a manuscript littered with typographical errors. When writing in English, be aware of the 3 person single form of the verb ending with an **s**, for example *The group meets regularly*.

4 After the group project has been completed

Once the “dust has settled”, I suggest the group meets and discuss your experiences: What worked well, and what did not work so well related to working together. And most importantly, what could you have improved on given your time constraints and knowledge.

Awareness on such issues is likely to help you in future group projects here at NMBU or later at work.

(2) *Own unpublished materials* includes any of your work you have not published or received university credits for. Check [NMBU regulations](#) for further information.