

# COLLABORATION ESSENTIALS

A Hoosier's Guide to Successful Teamwork



## 4 YEARS IN JUST A FEW PAGES

Explore teamwork insights and research from **six Indiana University upperclassmen** with experiences and majors from all over campus! Whether you are a group work free rider or a go-to leader, this handbook has effective techniques for you to steer any team towards meaningful success.

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# Our Purpose

## So, you want to learn about teamwork?

So did we. We are a team of six Indiana University students with varying backgrounds. We have different hometowns, high school experiences, college degrees, and interests. We were united as a student team in Digital Collaborative Writing, an intensive writing credit for undergraduates, and there is one thing we could all agree upon - *teamwork is hard!*

Each one of us has difficult, troublesome past team experiences to share. **But why does teamwork seem to go so wrong, especially for a majority of people in college?** This handbook is designed to answer this question and offer a wide array of techniques for effective, successful collaboration. We have found that teamwork can be incredibly efficient and helpful when executed correctly, and that is exactly what we are here to help you do! If you give your team the proper building blocks by focusing on organization, team culture, navigating conflict, and creating cohesion, you too revel in the benefits of productive teamwork.

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# Getting Organized

## Leadership

### Establish a Team Leader

**Leadership is continually cited as one of the most essential factors of team success.**

There are several theories of leadership that teams should consider when assigning or interacting with a leader.

#### **Transformational Leadership Theory:**

leadership determined by who someone is.

#### **Charismatic Leadership Theory:**

leadership determined by how someone interacts with others.

#### **Value-Based Leadership Theory:**

leadership determined by the actions someone takes

(Garrison, Leidner, Wakefield).

Research shows that the most successful group scenarios involve leaders who have **skills that cater to more than one of these theories**, and who can perform both people and task-oriented roles. Leaders can then clearly assign individual roles and tasks, team standards, and logistic details of the group work. In this way, effective leadership can curb group conflict altogether or make it significantly easier to navigate.

Student groups rarely assign group leaders, which can quickly lead to bad communication and task confusion. When leaders naturally emerge and are not directly agreed upon, frustration can spread throughout the group. **Leadership should be one of the first things discussed at the start of student groupwork.**

1. **What traits do we want in a team leader?**
2. **What is our goal with this project?**
3. **How can a leader help us achieve this goal?**

Some teams, like those in a professional work setting, come with preassigned roles and leaders. There are many facets of leadership in teamwork, and individuals can lead in a variety of different ways. If someone is not in a position of authority on their team, like being a boss or having a higher job rank, this does not mean they cannot lead. In larger teams, it is helpful to designate multiple leaders who manage smaller groups of people.

# Getting Organized

## Role Ambiguity

Task Schedules	Regular Communication	Actionable Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create early due dates</li> <li>• Hold team members accountable</li> <li>• Make clear assignments for each team member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish consistent meeting times</li> <li>• Use helpful technology</li> <li>• Share complications honestly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid repetition</li> <li>• Focus on the strengths of individual members</li> <li>• Promote equal participation</li> </ul>

### Create a Task Schedule

Implementing organization strategies is vital to team success. **Creating task schedules** is a great way to keep teams on track. “When you have a consistent schedule, you won’t be able to add more hours to your day magically. You will, however, spend less time making decisions, planning, and preparing. It also encourages you to stop wasting time on unproductive activities, like getting sucked into social media” (Miller 2019). This way teams can know what work they should be completing everyday, as well as when certain assignments are due by.

#### Task Schedule Tips

- Make tasks specific and actionable
- Assign to specific team members
- Create early due dates
- Schedule regular team check ins
- Don't over-delegate tasks

**Assigning roles and responsibilities to each individual team member** also helps to create an organized team and task schedule. If each member takes on a different role, a team won’t run into repetition or confusion. This allows for a member to take on their own responsibilities to help the team succeed as a whole. This also allows for the work of a team to be completed efficiently - each team member becomes accountable for their work.

### Regular Communication

Another way to help team organization is by communicating regularly. Regular communication combats confusion. Lack of communication among members allows for teams to get stuck in one place. If a team isn’t communicating regularly they won’t be able to understand or complete their work correctly.

# Getting Organized

## Effective Communication

Great communication strategies are essential for team success. Are you wondering how to establish effective communication with your teammates? Here are three important tips.

# 1

### Get to know your teammates

First, team members should get to know one another. Getting to know who you will be working with allows for **better communication**. If you know your team members, you will feel more comfortable when communicating with them. Getting to know your team members helps to develop and build relationships that you did not have prior. These relationships are what help strengthen your group.

# 2

### Focus on the Seven Principles

Another strategy that can be used, is incorporating the 7 principles of communication. "To make sure you communicate in the most effective manner possible, you need to know what are the 7 principles of communication" (Kashyap 2019). Being concrete, coherent, clarity, commitment, consistency, completeness, and courteous with your team can help avoid conflict and confusion. Consider the most concise and clear ways you can communicate **especially when using digital tools!**

# 3

### Exercise your Listening Skills

Lastly, it's important that each member listens to one another. "Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process" (SkillsYouNeed 2011-2020). This allows for **less misunderstandings between members**. Listening allows for every member to feel heard, and allows for ideas to be bounced off of each other. Overall, listening helps each member gain an accurate understanding. Effective communication must be used in order for a team to succeed.

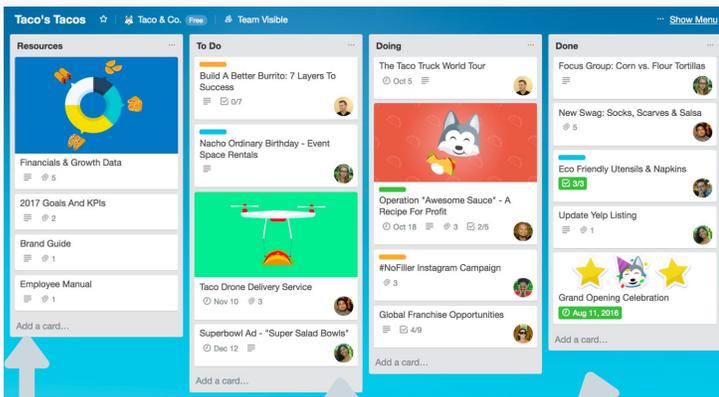
# Getting Organized

## Collaborative Tools

### Trello

★ *Most recommended resource!*

A unique and effective technology that can be used for greater collaborative efficiency is Trello. Teams that adopt Trello will be able to **utilize its user friendly task-board** format to assign tasks among themselves. Trello encourages self-accountability and provides a progress tracker which gives a sense of satisfaction once a task is completed. Trello gives a great boost to a team's focus and productivity, as well as promotes participation and open dialogue.



Space for resource sharing

Clear task list

Ability to assign to individuals

Obvious representation of what is/is not complete

### Google Docs

When selecting a technology for collaboration, it is important to choose a safe platform, one that is easy to navigate around, one that incorporates commenting features and one that fits the group dynamic. In Google docs, **multiple authors can edit one document and changes will be saved automatically** with the most updated version. This collaborative practice will allow for all group members to engage in an assignment. Also, in Google Docs, documents are private and can only be viewed by selected members, an outline tool is present that helps users navigate around the document, group members can leave comments anywhere in the document and Google Docs is suitable for a virtual classroom setting.

### A Collaboration Platform Should Have...

- ✓ Reliable Privacy
- ✓ Allows for Multiple Users
- ✓ Automatic Saving
- ✓ Tools for Editing and Commenting



# Getting Organized

## Collaborative Tools

**Indiana University also encourages the use of two standard but important technologies.** Teamwork is an excellent time to familiarize yourself with these tools, as you are likely to use them often throughout your professional career and personal life.

### Zoom

Students at Indiana University have access to the Zoom video conferencing software through their school email account at [iu.zoom.edu](https://iu.zoom.edu). Zoom provides the capability for virtual class, virtual one-on-one conferencing, and webinars. In addition, Zoom at IU can support meetings with up to 300 participants. Zoom **is one of the most effective technologies for real-time collaboration** in student groups. Your group can use the screen sharing features of Zoom to keep every member on the same page as you work or to share information quickly with each other. For more information and resources on Zoom at IU visit: <https://uits.iu.edu/zoom>.

In a Zoom meeting, try your best to keep your **camera on** and be in a **quiet, private location**. This shows other group members that you respect their time.

### GroupMe

GroupMe is a popular messaging platform among college students. This service allows you to form group messages quickly and easily and also provides direct message support. GroupMe is not directly affiliated with Indiana University, but accounts are free to set up with no limit on the number of groups you can join or create. Your group can set up an initial line of communication over GroupMe and **use this service to schedule meetings, share documents and links, and to get to know each other**. GroupMe is an excellent option for college communication and is perfect for collaborative projects.

If you decide to use GroupMe, turn your **notifications ON!** If not, it is easy to miss group communication entirely. Make sure each team member adjusts this parameter in their app settings.

# Building Team Culture

## Team Skills

**Group members should be time-efficient and diligent, challenge each other, be personable, and open to ideas.** These skills can assist individuals with working collaboratively and productively - especially if a team works fully or partially in a remote environment. Diligence through commitment to project tasks is crucial for a productive and collaborative environment. This is especially true when deadlines have to be met!

### Create a Team Charter

To cultivate this diligence, group members should create a team charter. This charter should document a mission statement, communal preferences for projects, guidelines for respect, specific dates for work times and status updates for projects. Group members can **create a more positive team culture** when deciding on a strategy of when and how they should respond to difficulties and stress before they find themselves in those situations. This can be seen in the professional world as well, where "Companies such as Deloitte are beginning to create team charters to document communication preferences and expectations" (Blankson 4).



### Consider All Ideas

Group members need to be organized and open to ideas. This is **crucial for a productive and collaborative environment** as people have different perspectives on topics, and each perspective should be thoroughly examined and documented. This can be highlighted in the team charter, but another way to be accepting of all ideas is to create an **online submission box**. With this tool, team members can submit ideas when they feel comfortable and articulate them to the best of their ability. This online submission can be anonymous if the team thinks this is best.

# Building Team Culture

## Psychological Safety

### Embrace Failure

**Failure is a part of succeeding.** This is crucial for a productive and collaborative environment as group members should be vulnerable and unafraid of failure during a project. According to Here's how to cultivate a work environment that produces great ideas.

**"The most forward thinking companies embrace risk taking and the possibility of failure. Plus, every failure can offer a teachable moment."** (Horton 3)

If a group member makes mistakes during group assignments, it is best they learn from them to prevent the same ones happening in the future. Group members making mistakes can also be **good reminders for others to check their work.** All should be supportive of failure and offer a helping hand if needed. The benefit of collaborating on a digital project is being able to work together toward a goal and or deadline to complete a project in a quick and efficient manner.

Collaborate  
Coordinate  
Control

### The 3 Cs

Business 2 Community, a business community website also mentions 3 C's (collaborate, coordinate and control) that drive a digital workplace. The 3 C's assist with an **"open, flexible, secure, and always-connect work**

**environment where employees can communicate with other team members, access information, and manage processes."** (Sambandam 1)

Group members should especially use this tactic when choosing a platform to communicate through. When choosing a platform, it is important to be open to the requests of others as some may not have access to certain tools.

# Building Team Culture

## Supporting Teammates

### The Buddy System

In addition, group members should put in place a “buddy system” or nominate a couple of group members who can be turned to for clarification questions or project troubles. According to How to Foster a Culture of Connection in the Digital Age, “Round-the-clock remote work hours and constant digital communication contribute to burnout, which can then lead to increased feelings of loneliness. **When people feel overwhelmed, exhausted and dehumanized, it heightens their risk for isolation.**” (Power 3) Group members should work to get their assignment done but also to support each other’s physical and mental health through the process.

### Group Interdependence

One key element to supporting team culture is developing group interdependence. Positive interdependence occurs when all members of a team believe they must succeed, and believe that their success is “dependent on coordination of group members’ efforts” (Colbeck, Campbell, Bjorklund).

There are several proven methods for establishing strong group interdependence. For student teams, one method includes working on real world projects and investigating problems faced by the industry they are studying. Student teams prefer working on problem-solving processes rather than “calculating a predetermined ‘right’ answer” for a project. This establishes group interdependence by **increasing team critical engagement and propelling the belief that their group work is meaningful.** Research also shows that positive student team experiences correlate with increased guidance from an instructor about how to work together (Colbeck, Campbell, Bjorklund).



# Navigating Conflict

## What is Conflict?

Conflicts are an inevitability in the realm of team projects. However, **it is critical for teams to resolve them in order to be successful.** Conflicts result from disagreements within the team and have the potential to halt the regular functioning of one. Though the term “conflict” has been steeped in negative connotation, the resolution of one can have many benefits as well. There are three main types of conflict that arise in teams.

**Task conflict:** arises when tasks are not clear.

**Relational conflict:** arises when group norms and personal understanding between team members is not clear.

**Process Conflict:** arises when logistic processes and methods are not clear. (Garrison, Leidner, Wakefield).

### The Forming Phase

It is in the best interests of a team to already have a set plan of possible solutions in case a conflict arises. These solutions can include but are not limited to voting, meetings, and mediation.

It is important to understand the creative and productive aspects of a conflict and its resolution. At the same time, conflicts can also **give rise to a dysfunctional team dynamic and frustration** (Johnson-Sheehan, Technical Communication Strategies for Today). Team members must keep in mind the possibility of conflicts during the forming phase of a project. This is an ideal time to discuss the most effective ways to avoid or resolve conflicts.

### The Storming Phase

After the forming stage, the team will typically transition to the storming phase. This **phase is characterized by the work actually beginning, and tensions and disagreements starting to brew.**

According to 2020 Project Management, potential causes of conflicts can include:

- Task interdependency
- Poor leadership by the team leader
- Insufficient authority given to the team leader
- Lack of communication or an understanding of objectives
- Lack of organization structures and role ambiguity
- Human emotion
- The prospect of change

# Navigating Conflict

## Techniques and Tools

### Navigation Strategies

A conflict has the potential to fester and be unresolved, fueled by the grievances not being addressed. **There are four stages of a conflict cycle: beliefs, conflict, response, and consequences.** The most optimal places to intervene in a conflict is at the belief and response stages (2020 Project Management). Ideally, the wronged party's point of view should be understood and resolved before a conflict has effectively started. At the response stage, the team leader must implement the previously mentioned resolution methods in order to reach a solution which is acceptable to all parties. Some of the possible solutions include:

**Accommodation** – agreement through yielding or conforming to the positions of others

**Compromise** – involves a search for a solution which is mutually acceptable, in order to reach a middle ground

**Collaboration** – a total membership approach to conflict resolution. Each team member accepts the fact that there is conflict, takes time to share values/needs, and discovers possible solutions

### Positive or Negative?

Team conflict can have both positive and negative impacts on team performance. The impact is dependent on the nature of the team, group norms, and how the conflict itself is navigated.

Team conflict has shown a positive impact on teams who exhibit high levels of emotional stability and openness. Alternatively, it has a negative impact on teams who do not exhibit these characteristics (Bradley, Postlethwaite, Brown).

### Emergent States Study

In a study on the effect of conflict, researchers evaluated emergent states in instances of task, relationship, and process conflict. Emergent states are **“attitudes, values, and cognitions held by members about the group that evolve via the interactive processes and influence group outcomes such as performance and viability”** (Jehn, Greer, Levine, Szulanski). Researchers found that relationship and process conflict had a negative effect on team viability. This type of conflict caused a loss of cohesion, respect, and trust within groups. However, task conflict had a positive effect on emergent states and team viability. Open group norms that encouraged the discussion and debate of task issues increased levels of trust, respect, and cohesion with other group members (Jehn, Greer, Levine, Szulanski).

# Creating Cohesion

## Writing Tools

Teams are often formed to write or create official documents with a variety of people's expertise and opinions. Effectively and efficiently compiling several authors' work into cohesive final projects is a difficult challenge for inexperienced teams. Read through these strategies before starting a new project or after completing a rough draft.

# 1

### Reverse Outline Strategy

The first strategy aims to make sure the document is well organized and is referred to as the "Reverse Outline" (How Can I Revise My Draft If It Doesn't Seem to 'Flow?'). One or two of your group members **should read through the draft and create an outline as they read**; this outline will be compared to the original outline to see how effectively each topic is described, where there might be repetitive ideas, and where paragraphs and sentences could be rearranged to most strongly reinforce the main idea of the document (Group Writing). After completing a revision based on the Reverse Outline Strategy, **try it again** to make certain the structure of the document is sound before moving on to other types of revision (Revising and Editing).

Original Outline



Outline Based off Team Draft



How do  
they compare?



# Creating Cohesion

## Writing Tools

### 2

#### Improving Document Flow

The second strategy aims to improve the flow of your final document. After compiling work from different authors there may be subtle differences in writing style or very large differences. The approach for revising flow is “**top-down**” which means the editing process will start at the paragraph-level and work its way down to the word-level (Revision Strategies). As your group begins its editing process, **examine the transitions between paragraphs**. Consider the following questions: does the jump from one idea to the next make sense? Will the reader understand how these ideas are related? Next examine the sentences within the paragraphs: What changes to the order of sentences might strengthen the readability and effectiveness of the parent paragraph’s idea? Are all of the sentences on topic? This is a good time to make sure any unwanted digressions are removed from the text.

### 3

#### Unifying Voice

The third strategy aims to unify the voice of the document. The voice of a document **dictates how your document will address its audience**. Think about who your document will be read by and how you will be publicizing it, a book report is written differently than a webpage (Revision Strategies). By discussing the intended voice of a document in your early planning sessions for the document, you can reduce the workload for this type of revision after creating your draft. The voice of a document is unified in a collaborative document by making sure that **no paragraphs disproportionately use active vs passive voice**, ensuring the document has the same tone (serious, casual, etc.) throughout, and that the audience is addressed the same way throughout the document (“Collaborative Writing Quick Guide”). Finally, examine the words of each sentence: Are these word choices appropriate? Are the words appropriately specific for the context of the document?

# Takeaways

**A successful collaborative project is defined by completing and submitting a high quality assignment.** The keys to success lie in team organization, effective communication, and building a healthy team culture. Review some of the strategies below before starting your next project!

## Organization

- Clearly define each member's role and responsibilities for the project.
- Teams are most effective when there is no confusion about expectations.
- Decide on a communication strategy. How often will you communicate? Do you need constant communication or are regularly scheduled meetings and emails sufficient?
- Develop a task schedule for each team member to make sure everyone is on the same page.

## Culture

- Team Conflict is inevitable, create a strategy for dealing with it so that your group can stay on task. Just remember to ACC - Accommodate, Compromise, and Collaborate!

## Strategies

- Create an outline for your project! Organizing your thoughts and ideas ahead of the first draft will drastically improve your final document. Be clear about your audience and publishing format. Different publication styles require different forms of writing.

## Communication

- Collaborative documents are best done on shareable documents! Checkout Google Suite and decide whether it is suited to your task.
- Explore different technologies you might use to communicate with your team. Some great options are Zoom, GroupMe, and Trello.

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