Communication and Teamwork Skills to Support Neurodiversity
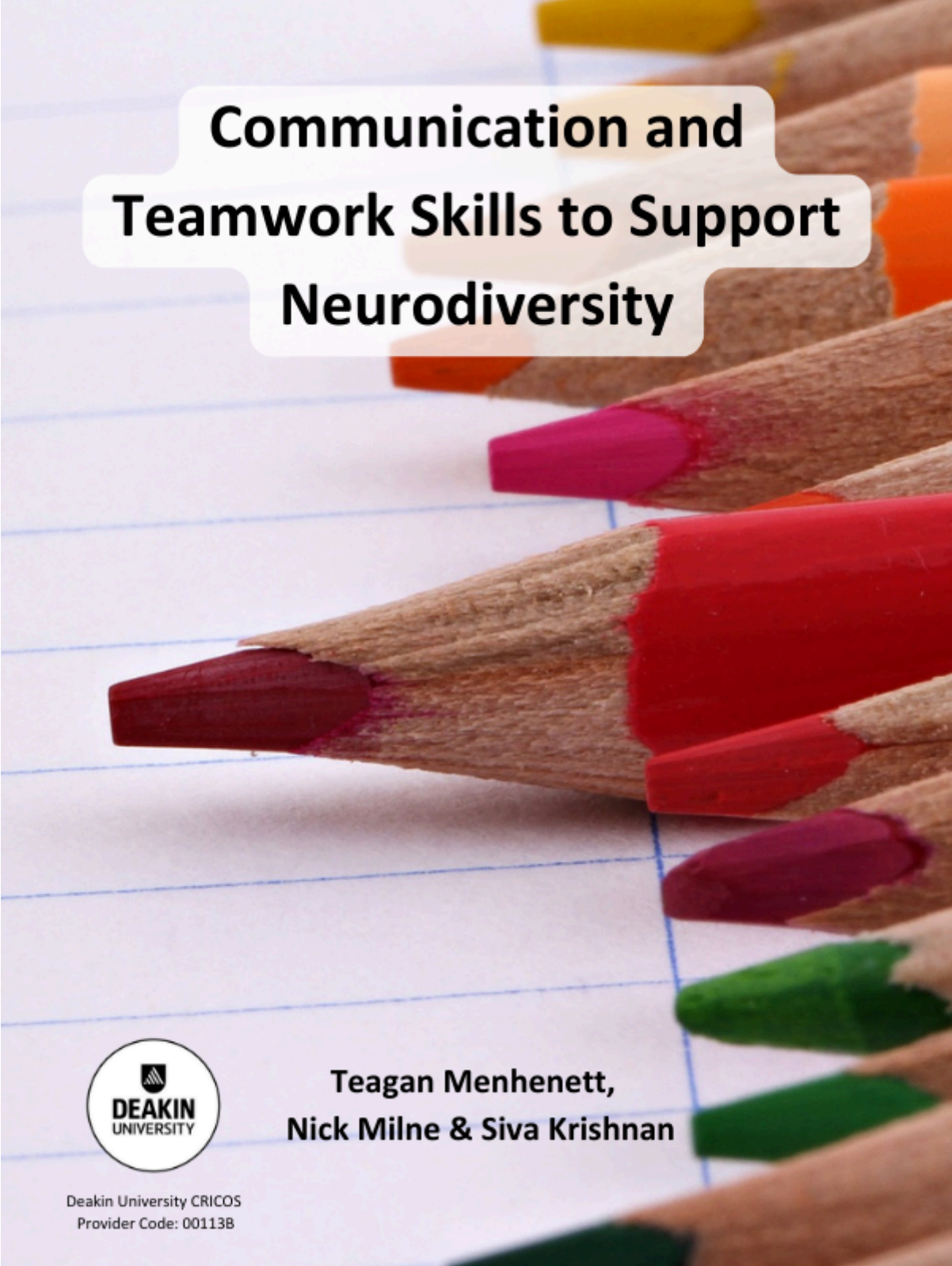

Communication and Teamwork Skills to Support Neurodiversity

Teagan Menhenett,
Nick Milne & Siva Krishnan

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Communication and Teamwork Skills to Support Neurodiversity

COMMUNICATION AND TEAMWORK SKILLS TO SUPPORT NEURODIVERSITY

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Deakin University
Geelong

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The authors of this resource would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of this nation. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the lands on which this resource was created: Wadawurrung Country, Yorta Yorta Nation and Wurundjeri Country. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge the neuro- and cultural diversity of First Nations Australians.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION

What has been considered when designing this resource?

- ### Language

  - This resource has been written in Plain English to ensure the content can be easily read and understood.

  - Terms that may be unfamiliar to readers have been defined. If the term appears in highlighted yellow, it can be clicked on to learn the definition. There is also a glossary at the end of the book, will all key terms.

- ### Engagement

  - This resource includes lots of different resources to ensure everyone has a way to engage with the information. This includes interactive activities, downloadable resources, videos and links to external resources for those who wish to extend their knowledge.
  - All activities that require a reader to interact with the content on the screen have been prefaced with "Interactive Activity".
  - Information is presented in short, easy-to-digest chapters.

- ### Colour

  - Information is not solely conveyed by colour.
  - Contrasting colours have been considered to ensure maximum readability for those with dyslexia or vision impairments.

Accessibility:

- The authors do recommend the use of a laptop when engaging with this resource as many of the interactive activities are more easily accessed on a larger screen.
- This resource includes third-party content, including links to other resources, or embedded videos.

If you notice any difficulties with the third-party content, or have any problems accessing this resource, please contact siva.krishnan@deakin.edu.au or n.milne@deakin.edu.au to let us know so we can fix the issue.

This resource is designed with the aim of being as accessible and inclusive as possible for all brains and we are always looking for ways to improve it. We welcome any feedback or suggestions.

This page has been informed by the [Accessibility Statement](#) of Coolidge et al (2018).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESOURCE

Neurodiversity refers to the differences in how our brains receive and process information. People who think, behave, process information, and learn in ways that considered 'typical' for a given situation or place are referred to as neurotypical. People who think, learn, behave, and process information in ways that considered 'atypical' in a given situation or place are referred to as neurodivergent. But not all neurotypicals (or all neurodivergents!) think, learn, or process information in the same way. You will learn more about what this looks like as you move through this resource.

Neurodiversity is a spectrum, and this resource "*Communication and Teamwork Skills to Support Neurodiversity*"has been created with that knowledge in mind.

This is, the aim of this resource is for it to be as accessible as possible for all brains.

How to navigate this resource:

- Utilise the contents page on the left-hand side of the page, or the arrows at the bottom of each page to navigate between different chapters. It is recommended you work through this resource chronologically.
- This book contains three main sections- 'Getting Started', 'Teamwork' and 'Communication'. Within each section are a number of chapters. Each chapter will have Learning Objectives at the beginning to give you an overview of what will covered, and Key Takeaways at the end to reinforce key information.
- The 'If You Need Help' chapter provides links to a variety of support resources available at Deakin, and there are email templates available in the 'Further Resources' section to assist you with contacting group and staff members.

We encourage you to come back to this resource throughout your degree, as you will build on your skills and understanding as you progress through your degree.

PART I
GETTING STARTED

This first section will help you familiarise yourself with some terms that will be used throughout the resource as well as providing an understanding of what neurodiversity means.

You will learn:

- What disability is;
- What neurodiversity and neurodivergence are; and
- The best-practice language to use when talking to people with a disability.

You will also work through resources designed to help you identify how you learn best.

1.

INTRODUCTION TO DISABILITY

Learning Objectives

- To understand how disability is defined, and some terms associated with disability.
- To understand the medical model and social model of disability.
- To recognise the different categories disabilities can be grouped into.

Interactive Activity: What is Disability?

This activity gives you an introduction to some of the different disability categories which are discussed in more detail below.

Click on the hotspots to complete the activity (Deakin University, 2024b), or scroll down to read the content.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it

online here:

https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=5#h5p-3

What is disability?

Disability is a condition which affects a person's body, brain, senses, or mind. Disabilities can be **hidden** or **visible** (Deakin University, 2024a).

Sometimes, people with disabilities use **aids** to assist them. These can be **communication** or **mobility** aids (Deakin University, 2024a).

Models of Disability:

The way that we talk about disability (our language) depends on our disability model. In Australia, two common disability models are the social model and medical model.

The **medical model** views disability as a defect within the individual. It looks at disability from a physical perspective and aims to 'fix' and individual by diminishing their disability. For people with a chronic disability, this approach can be harmful, as the model implies there will always be something 'wrong' with them. However, for someone with a broken arm, this approach can be exactly what is needed.

The **social model** believes that disability is caused by society being unwelcoming of people with an impairment or condition. The social model seeks to support disability by changing the environment around the person (eg. using ramps instead of stairs). The social model tends to consider the importance of building a culture that is as accessible for everyone as possible.

Both of these models have their place in our society. Neither is inherently 'right' or 'wrong'.

This section has been informed by Deakin (2024b).

Disability groups:

Read through the following disabilities categories. Do any surprise you?

Physical:

- Difficulties breathing

- Seizures or fainting

- Constant or recurrent pain or fatigue

- Limited use of arms, fingers, feet, or legs

- Difficulty moving, or physical deformity

Psychosocial:

- Emotional or psychological conditions, such as anxiety, depression or other mental illness

- Memory difficulties or confusion

- Social or behavioural challenges

Learning and understanding:

- Challenges with intellectual functioning, including ability to learn and understand, which can impact everyday life skills.

Sensory:

- Loss of sight or hearing

- Challenges when communicating verbally

Head injury, stroke, or acquired brain injury:

- Can include difficulties with cognitive functioning, physical and speech challenges, or emotional or behavioral changes that impact a person's independence, quality of life, and social interactions.

Other:

- Difficulties completing daily activities due to a long-term condition, or due to treatment or medication for an injury or condition.

All disabilities have an impact on a person's ability to function in their day-to-day life.

These disability groups draw from Deakin University (2024a) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2024).

Key Takeaways

- Disability affects the entirety of a person's functioning and is not always visible.
- There are two models that conceptualise our understanding of disability: the medical and the social model.
- There are different categories that disabilities can fall into; physical, psychosocial, intellectual, sensory, head injury, stroke, or acquired brain injury, or other.

These are some of the words you may have come across in this chapter:

Aids, **Communication (aids)**, **Disability**, **Hidden (disabilities)**, **Medical model of disability**, **Mobility (aids)**, **Social model of disability** and **Visible (disabilities)**

2.

INTRODUCTION TO NEURODIVERSITY

Interactive Activity: What do the terms neurodiverse, neurodivergent and neurotypical mean?

Work through the following interactive resource to develop your understanding of the above terms, and check your knowledge with some questions. You can enable full screen for the activity to make it easier to read.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it

online here:
https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=431#h5p-2

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Activity text version

Interactive Activity: What do the terms neurodiverse, neurodivergent and neurotypical mean?

To help ensure you are aware of the most appropriate language to use when interacting with your peers, work through these key definitions as well as some example sentences for each term.
If you are ever unsure what term to use, it is always okay to ask the person you are talking with what terms they identify with.

Neurodiversity:

- Is defined as "the diversity of human minds": the variation of functioning within our society; when multiple neurocognitive styles are represented in a group. (Walker, 2024, Neurodiversity section, para. 1).
- In other words, when considering a whole population or a diverse group of people, the group is considered neurodiverse.
- See the next slide for some examples of correct uses of the word neurodiversity.

Neurodivergence:

- When an individual's brain diverges or differs from what the society considers typical or 'normal' (Walker, 2024).
- There are many different conditions that fall under the umbrella of neurodivergence. Have a look at the next slide to see some examples of neurodivergent conditions.
- If you are interested in learning more about some of the conditions and terms associated with neurodivergence, you can have a look at the resource by Boren (2022). They have some helpful graphics which explain how terms can be used

appropriately, and what conditions come under the neurodivergent umbrella. This is located in the 'Reference List' chapter at the end of the book.

All these terms (and more!) come under the umbrella term of 'neurodivergence' (Walker, 2024).

- Autism
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Dyslexia
- Traumatic brain injury
- Bipolar disorder
- Borderline personality disorder
- Sensory processing disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Neurotypical:

- Individuals whose neurocognitive functioning falls within the typical or 'normal' societal standards. Neurotypical is the opposite of neurodivergent (Walker, 2024).
- Neurotypical people make up the majority of the population.

Conclusion

Both neurotypical and neurodivergent brains are needed for society (and indeed groups) to function well. There is nothing inherently 'good' or 'bad' about how different brains function.

As you move through this resource you will be able to develop an understanding of different brains and some strategies when working with people whose brain differs from your own.

Neurodivergent terms used throughout this resource:

Autism:

- A lifelong condition that "affects how a person thinks, feels, interacts with others, and experiences their environment" (Deakin University, 2023b).
- Autism can look like differences in communication, social interactions, sensory processing, and preferences for routines and structure (Deakin University, 2023b). However, every autistic person is different in their skill set, so it is important not to make assumptions.
- Use the [Deakin Autim webpage](#) to learn more about myths associated with autism

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder:

- A condition that "affects your brain's executive functioning, as well as your ability to self-regulate and control your thoughts, words, actions and emotions" (Deakin University 2023a).
- Also referred to as 'ADHD' or 'Variable Attention Stimulus Trait' (VAST) (Deakin University 2023a).
- Use the [Deakin ADHD webpage](#) to learn more about myths associated with ADHD

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder:

- A condition where people address obsessions (such as fear of contamination or germs, or the need for order) through compulsions (behaviors such as washing, checking, cleaning, counting, ordering and arranging) (Moulding, n.d).
- Also referred to as 'OCD'.
- Use the [Deakin Obsessive Compulsive Disorder blog post](#) to learn more about OCD

Dyslexia:

- Dyslexia is a "language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading." (The University of Melbourne, n.d).
- Use the [Dyslexic Students' Guide for Academics](#) to learn more information about

some misconceptions associated with dyslexia

When using the above terms, consider your language. As our society becomes more aware and accepting of neurodiversity, the language we use is beginning to positively frame these differences. The next chapter will provide a starting point for you to reflect on appropriate language.

Key Takeaways

- Neurodiversity refers to the entire population, neurotypical refers to those within the population who have a 'typical' way of thinking, and 'neurodivergent' refers to those with a different way of thinking.

These are some of the words you may have come across in this chapter:

ADHD, **Autism**, **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**, **Dsylexia**, **Neurodivergence**, **Neurodiversity**, **Neurotypical**.

3.

LANGUAGE TO USE WHEN TALKING ABOUT DISABILITY

Learning Objectives

- To understand the difference between identity-first and person-first language.
- To understand what terms are appropriate to use when talking about disability, and which ones may be inappropriate.

Person-First and Identity-First Language

Person-first language respects the personhood of people with disabilities. Person-first language puts the person before the disability. We might say,

- "People with disability" or "people with disabilities"

- "People with mobility disability"

- "En Le has schizophrenia"

Many government services, workplaces, and schools in Australia use and recommend

person-first language. However, many disability advocates and support services have raised concerns with person-first language and prefer to use identity-first language.

Identity-first language recognises that disability is a part of who the person is. Identity-first language doesn't only describe the person's mind or body, but also the person's membership of a wider group of people. We might say,

- "Disabled people"

- "I'm Australian and part of the Deaf community"

- "Autistic students and teachers"

There are many arguments for, and against, person-first and identity-first language. The argument for person-first language is that the person isn't themselves disabled: the person is only disabled by society.

The argument for identity-first language is that disability isn't negative and may be part of how the person sees themselves (their identity).

Language is very personal. When talking to a person with a disability, a general rule of thumb is to check or replicate the language that the person uses to talk (or not talk) about disability so that the space is accessible and inclusive for everyone. It can be a good idea to ask, "Do you identify as a person with a disability?" To ask someone how to talk about their disability, you might say "How would you like me to refer to (or not refer to) your disability?". Or you could also ask "What language do you use when talking about your disability?".

Interactive Activity: General Language for Talking About Disability

The language that we use to talk about disability in general, and about disabled people in particular, has changed over time. Some of the words that we used to use are no longer acceptable or appropriate. For example, 'accessible parking' is now used instead of 'handicapped parking'.

The following activity will help develop your understanding of disability inclusive language instead of outdated or inappropriate words. Drag and drop each word or phrase into either the 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' side.

This is only a starting point: there are lots of different resources online to help you learn more about current disability inclusive terms, or the reference list at the end of this book has some good options.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=100#h5p-11

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1 2 3

Activity Text Version

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1. 'Special needs' is used in some situations (such as 'support for special needs' at a primary school. However, this term shouldn't be used outside these limited situations.

2. 'People with disability/ies' tends to be used in formal writing

3. 'People with disability/ies' and 'disabled people/person' can be used interchangeably in disability inclusive communication.

Interactive Activity: General Language for Talking About Disability

This activity invites students to drag and drop 12 different terms into either the category of 'inappropriate or outdated terms' or the category of 'appropriate or current terms' when talking about disability. The answers are as follows:

Terms that are considered 'inappropriate or outdated':

- Handicapped, crippled, special needs (footnote: 'Special needs' is used in some situations -such as 'support for special needs' at a primary school. However, this term shouldn't be used outside these limited situations)
- Handicapped parking
- Able-bodied, healthy, normal
- Afflicted by, suffers from, victim of, lives with
- Seeing-eye dog, emotional support dogs, epilepsy dog
- Disability accessible

Terms that are considered 'Appropriate or current':

- wheelchair accessible, hearing loop enabled, AUSLAN translator available
- People with disability/ies (footnote: People with disability/ies' tends to be used in formal writing) and disabled people/person (footnote: 'People with disability/ies' and 'disabled people/person' can be used interchangeably in disability inclusive communication)
- Accessible parking
- Service dog, service animal
- Person without disability, non-disabled person
- (Person) has (disability)

Video: Let's take a minute to learn more about language.

To learn more about the language we use when speaking to and about autistic people, watch this Tedx presentation (13 minutes) or read through the Neurodiversity Toolkit below. Or you can do both!

Tedx Talk:

In this talk Jac den Houting discusses the medical and social models in the context of autism, as well as speaking about some of the assumptions we tend to make about autistic people.

This video has closed captions available. If you would prefer, you may watch this video on YouTube.

> One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: *https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=100#oembed-1*

Further Reading:

You can access the 'Neurodiversity Toolkit' which has a section at the end, titled

"Neurodiversity Cultural Sensitivity" about helpful language to use when talking to, and about autistic people. The resource also contains information on making meeting environments sensory friendly (Radulski, 2020). It is a useful resource for further reading.

Interactive Activity: How does the information on this page fit with your understanding of appropriate language?

Write your reflection or thoughts in the text box below. You can respond to the prompts, or to your thoughts about the above resources. Once you have answered all the questions, you have the option to export your response as a word document.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
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Activity Text Version

Interactive Activity: How does the information on this page fit with your understanding of appropriate language?

This activity asks students to type their response to the following prompts in a text box: What did you learn from these resources? How has your understanding of language use changed?

The next slide asks the following question:

True or false? All autistic people are the same.

The correct answer is false. Every autistic person is different, just as every neurotypical person is different. We all have different support needs, capacities and abilities.

Key Takeaways

- When talking about a disabled person, it good practice to check whether they prefer identity-first or person-first language when talking about their disability. Eg. Do they prefer to say "I am autistic" or "I have autism".
- Be aware of outdated terms when talking about disability.
- To ask someone how to talk about their disability, you might say "How would you like me to refer to (or not refer to) your disability?". Or you could also ask "What language do you use when talking about your disability?".
- Develop an understanding of autism specifically and the language preferences of the autistic community.

These are some of the words you may have come across this chapter:

Accessible, **Autism**, **Identity-first** and **Person-first language**, **Inclusive**, **The Social Model of Disability** and **The Medical Model of Disability**,

4.

HOW DO YOU LEARN BEST?

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, you will:

- Be able to consider your strengths and challenges when working with others.
- Have an understanding of some suggestions for growth.

You will also have completed the following activities:

- A learning styles quiz
- A Welcome to Me resource and
- A Group Strengths quiz

Introduction:

Now that you understand some of the key terms to use when looking at disability, we're going to have a look how you might learn effectively.

We all learn in different ways and have different **strengths** and **weaknesses**. Thinking about our strengths and weaknesses can help us in identifying what we do well and areas where we may need to improve. For example, you may be great at planning, but really

struggle to start writing a task. Or you may learn better when information is given to you verbally.

Have a think about some of your strengths as a learner. What activities excite you? Do you prefer visual, auditory or kinesthetic (touch-based) learning? Do you enjoy presenting in front of a group of people?

It's okay if you don't know yet; this chapter will help you find out!

Interactive Activity: Learning Styles Quiz

Your first activity is to complete a free learning styles quiz. This quiz is important because we all learn in different ways. Knowing your learning style will help you figure out how you learn best and allowing you to ask for help if your team is not supporting your learning needs.

It will take about 5 minutes to complete. All you need to do is put your gender, age range and reason for completing the quiz (put which reason feels best). Then start the quiz.

At the end of the quiz, there is an option to input your email address to receive a copy of your results. Please be aware that this link is hosted by a third-party site and providing your email address is **not** required in order to access the results

Complete the quiz, at the Learning Style Quiz website.

Once you have your results, read through them and reflect on these prompts:

- Is there anything you are surprised about?
- What did you learn about yourself?

No one learning quiz will perfectly capture who you are as a person, but the more you reflect on your abilities and strengths, the better you will understand yourself. Knowing your strengths, weaknesses and areas for growth are incredibly valuable, not only at university, but also when you go into the workforce.

Interactive Activity: Welcome to Me

Welcome to Me is a resource for you to fill out to reflect on who you are as a person and what you need to succeed. Try to be as detailed as possible.

At the end, download and save the document for you to refer back to, and for sharing the information you feel comfortable to with your teammates. This might include things like communication preferences, availability for meetings, any challenges with working with others, or anything else you think is important to consider when working with others.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=75#h5p-4

Activity Text Version

Interactive Activity: Welcome to Me

This resource is for you to reflect on how you work, what your strengths are, what you may find challenging, and how other team members can help you.
Only share what you feel comfortable with but be as open as you can. The more information you can share with your team, the better you will all be able to work together.
Remember to download and save your answers at the end so you can share with your team.

Students then click through 5 different prompts which ask them to reflect on who they are and how they learn. The prompts are listed below:

I am...

You can use some of the questions as a prompt or respond to "I am..." with whatever comes to mind! You can use dot points or full sentences to answer.

- On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being introvert and 10 being extrovert), where do you sit?
- What three action words would you to describe yourself?
- How do you show your friends that you care?
- What do you value when working in a team?
- How do you recharge your social battery?
- How do you give your brain a break?
- What is your learning style?

Ask me about...

You can use some of the questions as a prompt, or respond to "Ask me about..." with whatever comes to mind! You can use dot points or full sentences to answer.

- What makes your eyes sparkle?
- What excites you to talk about?
- What is one thing you've accomplished in your life that you are most proud of?

• What is something interesting that you are currently learning about?

Tell me with...

You can use some of the questions as a prompt, or respond to "Tell me with..." with whatever comes to mind! You can use dot points or full sentences to answer.

• How do you preferred to be communicated with?
• What was the most helpful piece of advice you have ever received, and how was it provided?
• What was the most challenging piece of advice you have ever received, and how was it provided?
• What's worked best to support you're learning in the past?
• The best book contains...

I work best when...

You can use some of the questions as a prompt, or respond to "I work best when..." with whatever comes to mind! You can use dot points or full sentences to answer.

• What are your expectations of others in your team?
• What are your expectations of yourself?
• How do you prefer to deal with conflict?
• What's the best way to give you advice?
• How do you prefer to give feedback or ask questions?
• How do you deal with unmet expectations?
• How do you best receive performance feedback?
• What a "safe group environment" feel like to you?
• Do you prefer to have lots of tasks on the go at once, or finish them in order?
• Where do you work best?
• What does "best work" mean to you?
• How do you measure success?
• How do you reflect on your successes?

I struggle without...

You can use some of the questions as a prompt, or respond to "I struggle without..." with whatever comes to mind! You can use dot points or full sentences to answer.

• When you ask for help, what does 'help' look like to you?• When you say "I have too much on at the moment", what would help you change that?

- What are some signs you may need help, but be unable to ask for it?
- When your team has a meeting scheduled, what information helps you feel comfortable going into that meeting?
- What does constructive feedback look like to you?
- When you say "I've given up", what would help you change that?

Interactive Activity: Teamwork Style

Complete this quiz to see what Australian animal best represents your teamwork style. It will help you to see the ways others communicate, and how your learning style may fit within that. It will also help you develop confidence in yourself and how you work within a team.

You may think you are more of a mix of all the animals, or one stands out. There is no right or wrong answer, this is simply another way to help you find your strengths when working with others.

The four animals are described in detail below if you would prefer not to complete the quiz.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=75#h5p-5

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For reference, these are the four Australian animals in the quiz.

*Throughout this resource you may see little pictures of these animals. Wherever you see one of these images, it is suggesting that the activity, information, or resource would be helpful to you if you identify with the characteristics of this animal. *

Blue Wren

Blue Wren Qualities:
Strengths:

- Being able to provide a 'birds-eye-view'
- Seeing gaps in the task
- Getting to the "heart of the issue".

Weaknesses:

- You may find yourself taking on too much of the admin role rather than it being shared among the team.
- You may also value group harmony over difficult conversations.

Growth:

- Learning how to set boundaries and have conversations if something is bothering you.

Wombat

Wombat Qualities:
Strengths:

- A deep thinker
- You do your research and know what is what.
- You are steady and calm and help keep others on task.

Weaknesses:

- You often find yourself set in your ways.
- You may find yourself avoiding difficult conversations with others.

Growth:

- An area of growth for you is learning how to respectfully disagree with others and looking at things from a different perspective.

Kangaroo

Kangaroo Qualities:

Strengths:

- You are confident and motivated.
- A high level of energy and purpose and will get things done asap!

Weaknesses:

- Your high levels of energy may reduce as the task goes on.
- You may find yourself dominating conversations within the team.

Growth:

- Learning to breaking down tasks into smaller chunks to keep your motivation going throughout the project.

Echidna

Echidna Qualities:

Strengths:

- Your ability to pick up lots of new ideas
- Being a curious and fast learner

Weaknesses:

- You can find it difficult to pick one idea out of all the ideas in the air.
- You can find it difficult to follow an idea all the way to completion.

Growth:

- Learning how to break a big task into smaller chunks so it's easier to complete.
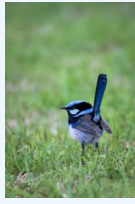
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Further Information:

For further information about how different brains might think, have a look through the article below which discusses different autistic thinking styles. Specifically, it talks about visual thinkers, verbal/logic thinkers and pattern thinkers. It also talks about the differences between bottom-up, associative, analytical and lateral thinkers (Silvertant, 2023).

Even if you do not identify as autistic, this could be something you are interested in learning about when working with others in your team. Feel free to visit the website and read through in your own time.

Thinking Styles in Autistic People

Key Takeaways

- We all have different styles of learning and needs when it comes to working in a team. Reflecting on your strengths and areas for growth is important to not only improve your own self-awareness, but also your understanding of others.

These are some of the words you may have come across in this chapter:

Strengths and **Weaknesses**

PART II
TEAMWORK

This next section will give you an understanding of the following:

- What teamwork is;
- What teamwork will look like over your 4-year degree;
- Some challenges you may experience working in a team and possible solutions;
- A structure for your first meeting as a team;
- Activities to reflect on your progress.

5.

INTRODUCTION TO TEAMWORK

Learning Objectives

- To understand how teamwork is defined.
- To reflect on previous experiences of teamwork and consider ways to improve for the future.

Teamwork

Over the course of your engineering degree and in your future carer (wherever that may be), you will be working in teams.

For this resource we define teamwork as 2 or more people working collaboratively and effectively together to achieve a common goal.

In your degree this may look like a team project with more than 4 people, or it may be pairs or teams of 3 for practical's and class work. More information about the _types_ of work you will be completing in your team is in the next chapter.

Sometimes you will have positive experiences in your team, and sometimes you may have negative, or more challenging experiences. This resource is designed to help scaffold some of the situations you may face working with others and provide you with some supports to navigate this.

Sometimes it can be frustrating to work in a team, especially with people you may not know. However, it is a very important skill to learn and something that will serve you well in your future carer. No person ever works in isolation, so it is important to develop your skillset.

Interactive Activity: Add your contribution to the Padlet below!

Add your contribution to the Padlet below based on your previous work in a team. Scroll across to answer all 3 questions.

This is a public forum so please be considerate of the language you use.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=348#h5p-13

Activity text version

Interactive Activity: Add your contribution to the Padlet below!

This activity invites students to respond to the prompt 'Think about a time you've worked in a team' by answering the following questions:

- What went well?
- What did you find challenging?
- What is a way you could overcome these challenges?

Key Takeaways

- Reflect on your past experiences as a team and consider what has worked well, and what you could improve on for next time.

These are some of the words you may have come across in this chapter:

Teamwork

6.

YOUR 4-YEAR DEGREE

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Learning Objectives

</div>

- To have a broad understanding of what will be required of you for each of the 4 years of your degree.
- To know what different learning tasks you will engage in to develop your teamwork skills.

Interactive Activity: Your 4-year Engineering degree

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=107#h5p-14

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Activity Text Version

Interactive Activity: Your 4-year Engineering degree

This activity will give you an example roadmap for the different activities a student will undertake over the course of a 4-year engineering degree. Students will experience similar learning activities in other vocational degrees.

Students are then invited to click on a bubble which tells them about a part of their degree, or involves an interactive activity. The content is presented sequentially here.

First Year:

In first year, you will focus on learning some of the key teamwork skills needed throughout your course and when you graduate. The unit team will try to help you understand where you currently are with regards to your teamwork skills, as well as what it takes to be a good team member. Working through these modules is part of that. Teamwork in first year will be more structured, but make sure you take advantage of incidental teamwork in seminars and workshops to improve your skills. Your teams are also more likely to be specified in first year (eg. your lecturers may assign you to teams rather than you choosing your own).

True/ false question 1:

1. The teamwork skills you learn in first year will help set you up for success in later years.

The correct answer is true- Well done! It's important to start developing skills in first year so you have a baseline for the rest of your degree.

Second year:

In second year, you will focus on strengthening the skills you have started to develop. You will see a lot more self and peer reviews which are designed to help you reflect on how you can improve your teamwork skills. Make sure you come back and look over the activities in this resource to help you in this year.

Multiple choice question 1:

1. Which of the following is true regarding self and peer reviews?
   a. Self and peer reviews are designed to make extra work for students.
   b. Self and peer reviews help to reflect on an individuals skills and contribution to the project.
   c. Reviews don't improve teamwork skills.

The correct answer is b) Self and peer reviews help to reflect on an individual's skills and contribution to the project.

Third and Fourth Year:

In third and fourth year, you are reaching the final stages of your degree, and we expect you will be working with more autonomy. You are more likely to work in multi-disciplinary teams at this point, similar to what will happen when you move into the workplace. It is important by this point that you know your strengths and weaknesses, particularly where you are defining team tasks. The teaching teams will expect you to ensure that, where necessary, you assign yourselves and your team mates tasks that sit within their discipline.

Types of tasks you'll complete:

Now you have an understanding of what you might expect in each year of your degree, click through the next bubbles to learn about some of the different tasks you'll be completing.

True/false question 2:

1. You will be expected to complete all of your group work with the same people each time.

The correct answer is false- That's right! There will many opportunities to work with different peers in group tasks.

Labs and Pracs:

Throughout your studies, you will engage in labs and pracs, generally completing the lab as a team. It is important that the whole team engages in the task so everyone has an understanding of the content, and also experiences working together as a group. Many students comment that they learn a lot during practical activities as they develop first-hand experience of what they have been learning.

Workshops and Seminars:

Students at all year levels will participate in various workshops and seminars that will sometimes require teamwork. Much of this is incidental, that is, you will be asked to work with other people you happen to be sitting with. These sessions are designed to develop skills such as leadership, communication, and collaboration, essential for success in the engineering field. They give you an opportunity to practice some of the skills you will need in your more formal assessments.

Peer Review:

Throughout your course you are likely to encounter peer review multiple times. In most instances, you will be asked to rate the performance of yourself and team members. It is important to be honest in this process because, as you progress, you will be asked to use these opportunities to reflect on how you interact with a team and how you are improving in this respect. You will also sometimes be asked to comment on other student's work. This is often done as a way to get some constructive feedback before the teaching team assesses the work. It is important that you provide constructive feedback- that is, something that is clear, balanced and focuses on solutions to improve the student's work, rather than just highlighting shortcomings.

Design Projects:

Deakin University's approach to teaching means you will encounter design projects throughout your degree at every year level. These will often (but not always) include elements of teamwork. In these instances, you would be expected to collaborate towards the completion of a design of build (similar to what you would do in a work environment). You may be expected to contribute to part of the design, or you may be expected to work as a team in the entire design process, contributing towards all components of the design. It is important that you and your team are on the same page for this, particularly with the approach you are going to take. The outputs of design projects can be variable. You may all need to contribute to a report or provide a presentation or demonstration of your project. What is most important is ensuring that whatever form this takes, that it is not just a series of sections "stapled" together. You want to ensure that the work is properly integrated and flows well. As a team, you should all review the outputs before they are submitted, so make sure you allow some time for this.

Multiple choice 2:

1. Select from the following all of the different tasks you will complete as part of your 4-year degree:
   a. Peer review tasks
   b. Labs
   c. Design Projects
   d. Practical's
   e. Workshops and seminars

The correct answer is all the tasks- That's right! You'll complete all these tasks in your degree.

Key Takeaways

- As you progress through each year of your degree, you will gain experience in a variety of teams.
- You will also complete a variety of different tasks during your degree, all of which will help you to develop teamwork and self-reflection skills and prepare you for your future career.

These are some of the words you may have come across in this chapter:

Teamwork

7.

YOUR FIRST MEETING AS A TEAM

Learning Objectives

- To understand what to discuss in your first meeting as a team, and to have resources to support this.

Strategies for your first meeting:

It can be difficult to navigate your first team meeting. This chapter provides you step-by-step instructions to help understand your team members, their interests and establish some ground rules for teamwork.

It is okay to feel anxious or uncertain; you can use these activities to get to know others in your team. You may find your teammates feel the same way. Talking about how you feel and using some of the strategies identified below might help you overcome feelings of anxiety. This activity has been informed by Benavides (2022).

At the end of this section there is a simple version of these strategies you can download to use at your first meeting. The steps are explained in more detail here.

- ## Strategy 1: Introductions and Icebreakers

  - Ensure everyone introduces themselves and has the opportunity to share something about themselves (eg. Favourite food, hobbies etc.). It is also a good idea to engage in an icebreaker activity (as outlined below), which can help everyone feel comfortable in the team space.

Ice-breaker Activity

Ice-breakers are often a dreaded activity in classrooms or teams, but they can be fun. Icebreakers are activities designed to 'break the ice' between team members, to help ease the anxiety team members may be feeling about working with unfamiliar people. The aim is to start a conversation, learn something new about your teammates or share a laugh together. The activity is designed to put you out of your comfort zone a little bit, but remember, all your teammates are feeling just as uncomfortable and apprehensive as you!

Here are some prompts you might like to consider getting to know your teammates:

- What colour socks are you wearing? (*This can be a good opportunity to share why you chose those particular socks today, or if there is a story behind your socks).*
- If you could pick any superpower (eg. super speed, flying, strength etc.), what would it be and why?
- What is your favourite animae? *(This would only work if everyone watched animae).*
- If money was not an issue, where is your ideal holiday destination and why?
- What are you currently watching on Netflix (or Disney +, or your preferred steaming service)?

Feel free to come up with any other questions that might help you to get to know your teammates better.

- ## Strategy 2: Sharing contact information

  - Record the contact details below for each of your team members. It is also helpful to discuss preferred mode of communication that you will use as a team, eg. Email or a messenger groupchat.

  Team Contacts List

  Access the PDF template below and have everyone share their preferred contact information. Decide as a team what your main method of communication will be. Ensure everyone has a copy of the contacts list.

  Team contacts list (PDF)

- ## Strategy 3: 'How Do You Learn Best' chapter resources

  - Use the information in the chapter 'How do you learn best?' to discuss your results from the 'Welcome to Me' resource, learning styles quiz, and group strengths quiz with your teammates. Mention any specific communication needs or accommodations you can make as a team to support each other. Only share what you feel comfortable to.

- ## Strategy 4: Establishing ground rules

  - This can form your team charter and can be something everyone refers to throughout the project. Ensure everyone signs and has a copy of this team charter to refer to throughout the project. Complete the 'Ground rules' activity below together to determine these rules. Discuss what good teamwork looks like.

Ground Rules

Every team operates according to some rules, but they are often unspoken. These can be changed over time as you work together, but establishing a starting point is important. This activity will guide you to create some strong ground rules you can use as a team to ensure everyone agrees and understands the boundaries of the project.

- A good starting point would be to consider:

  - Where and when the meeting will take place

  - Methods of communication that will be used

  - Shared aims, goals and outcomes

  - How will the workload be shared

  - Agreement on each member's contribution, commitment to make teamwork successful

  - What you'll do if you don't hear from a team member after a certain number of days

  - Expected standards and behaviour

  - Avoiding plagiarism

Print this charter so everyone has a copy. Ensure everyone signs it to indicate agreement with it.

Time required: 20-30 minutes

- ## Strategy 6: Setting goals and timelines

  - These could be directly related to the assessment task but may also

be about working as a team or other broad goals. Complete 'Setting and Achieving Goals' below, including the handout to identify aims for the team project.

- Establish a rough timeline for each part of the assignment based on the timeline suggested by your lecturer. This can be created as a visual planner, dates in diaries/ calendars or aligned to trimester dates (eg. Week 1, 2 etc.).

Setting and Achieving Goals

It is important to have goals as a team, so you know what you are working towards, and why you are working together. Having a goal allows you to know what your focus is and can give you something to celebrate at the end of the project.

Instructions

- Brainstorm what you would like to achieve as a team. Start big (e.g. complete the assignment), and use the handout below, or the website below to refine your broader goals into more manageable ones. You can also find your own way of creating goals if something is more suitable.

Goblin tools is a website that can help you to refine your goals.

Time required: 15 – 20 minutes

Note: if you find it overwhelming to look at the whole task in one go or find yourself losing motivation over the course of the team project, breaking the task into small, manageable chunks can be really helpful.

When considering who is responsible for each task, also consider whether everyone has a fair amount of work. Is one person doing all of the admin work? How can you share the tasks fairly for everyone?
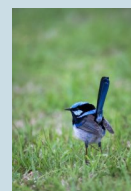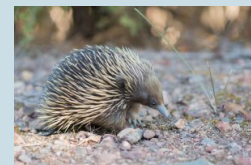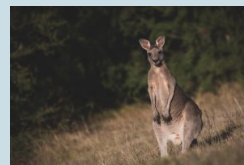
Here is an example template your team might like to use when creating your goals: Example Goal Template (PDF)

- **Strategy 7: Organise your next meeting**
  - Organise the next meeting time and location at the end of your first meeting so everyone knows when you will next meet.

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Checklist

Follow this simple checklist at your first meeting. As you go through your meeting, try to tick off the activities you've completed.

Here is a PDF copy you can have handy: Checklist for Your First Meeting

1. Has everyone introduced themselves?
2. Do you know at least one fact/ interesting piece of information about each team member?
3. Does everyone have a copy of the group contact list?
4. Do you know the best way to communicate with everyone (messenger, email etc.)?
5. Have you decided on some guidelines or rules to follow as a team and does everyone have a copy of these rules?
6. Have you set goals for your project?

7. Is the work fairly and evenly distributed among team members?
8. Do you have a rough timeline for the project?
9. Have you arranged a time and location for your next meeting?

Key Takeaways

- Refer back to this chapter at your first meeting, and throughout your assessment tasks to develop a good starting point for your teamwork.

8.

TEAM STAGES

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Learning Objectives

</div>

- Develop an understanding of the broad stages a team can go through.
- To be aware of some challenges you may face in each stage and start to think of some solutions to these challenges.

Introduction:

When you first form a team there will always be a period while you are getting to know one another and learning how to work together. Settling into your team and learning how to work with different members of your team can be tricky.

Bruce Tuckmans's Team Development Model shown below will help you understand the different stages of team development, and some of the challenges you may face in each stage. Even if you think that your team is working well, this model can be useful in understanding what characterises success in each stage and the skills your team can learn along the way and benefit from.

It is important to understand that working cohesively as a team requires time and input from every team member, and rarely happens straight away. Work through this section and the activities in the next chapter to develop some solutions and strategies for if your teamwork becomes challenging.

Interactive Activity: Stages of Team Formation

The stages were developed by an educational psychologist Bruce Tuckman and their definitions and examples are informed by John/Lynn Bruton and Lumen Learning (n.d.). Work through this activity to learn about each of the stages.

> 📄 *An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*
> *https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=117#h5p-15*

Activity Text Version

Interactive Activity: Stages of Team Formation

This activity invites participants to click along a graph. The graph is labelled 'team effectiveness' on the y axis, and 'time' on the x axis. As you move through the five stages of teamwork there is an initial drop in effectiveness during the 'storming' stage, before increasing as the team moves through the 'norming' stage. Team effectiveness reaches the highest point in the 'performing' stage before it drops slightly into the 'adjourning' stage. Students are invited to click along each stage to learn more about them. The stages are as follow:

Forming:

In this stage the team is getting to know each other. At this stage of the team project, you may be wondering what you need to do for the project and whether you will fit in with your team members. You may be feeling anxious, exited or indifferent about the task ahead.

It is important for everyone to be heard, particularly at your first meeting. This means it is everyone's responsibility to ensure each person has the opportunity to speak. This may also mean considering alternate methods of communication such writing out information or emailing it to the group. More information on communication can be found in the 'Communication' chapter.

Storming:

This is the most challenging phase for teams. Often there is conflict and competition. The overall cohesiveness of the group may decrease as disagreements may occur over team goals or tasks. This can cause frustration, unease and even anger in team members.
The next chapter of this resource looks at some of the different challenges you can experience in a team, as well as some possible solutions. Working through these activities will be very helpful for you in this stage.

Norming:

The conflicts have largely resolved by this stage and a sense of unity becomes apparent. There is consensus and clarity over everyone's roles, and everyone generally feels comfortable to share their thoughts with the group.

Performing:

In this stage, the group can effectively deal with problems and is generally working cohesively and cooperatively. The project is likely almost ready to submit or be presented and the team is able to generate one last push in order to finish.

Adjourning:

This is the final stage of the team project, and the main assignment is either already completed, or almost completed. At this point, it is a great idea to celebrate your success. Even if the project didn't turn out how you wanted, celebrate what you have achieved and reflect on what you could do differently next time.

Work through the 'As the Project is Finishing' chapter which has some questions and activities to guide reflection. You will also be completing self and peer assessments which will help you to develop critical reflection skills, helping you to improve your abilities and skills for future projects.

Key Takeaways

- Teams rarely experience no conflict or challenges. Being aware of the various stages your team might move through can help you to consider these challenges before they occur and allow you to reflect on them.

9.

CHALLENGES OF TEAMWORK

Learning Objectives

- Learn about the different challenges you might face when working in a team and develop some possible solutions.

Challenges in Teamwork

Regardless of the career you choose and irrespective of where you work (location) or who you work for (for yourself or for an employer), it is highly likely that you will work in a team environment. Working in a team environment often comes with its own challenges. Additionally, you will have the challenge of working through and delivering on your tasks. In this chapter, you will learn about a few challenges (problems) that you might face, how to overcome those challenges and develop important teamwork skills.

Interactive Activity: Challenges and Solutions

Click on the image hotspots to learn some possible solutions to the challenges you may face. The words in the background correspond to each challenge that is discussed.

Here is a PDF copy of the below challenges and solutions if you would like to save them for future reference: Challenges and Possible Solutions. There are 12 challenges to learn about.

> 📱 *An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*
> *https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=120#h5p-9*

The content in the above activity has been informed by the following sources: John/Lynn Bruton and Lumen Learning (n.d) and Think Student Editor. (2024, 13 March).

Activity text version

Interactive Activity: Challenges and Solutions

This activity lists 12 challenges of groupwork and students are invited to click on each challenge to learn about possible solutions.

Challenge 1:

Navigating social interactions as the team gets to know each other and decide on roles within the team.

Possible Solutions:

- Each member sharing the "Welcome to Me" resource and discussing as a team everyone's communication styles and preferences and how these can be met.
- Learn about any specific learning styles in your group- eg. Neurodivergence, mental illness, physical illness, and discuss what you can do to help make the space more inclusive for everyone. Remember: some people may not feel comfortable disclosing personal information about themselves. It is important to respect this, and instead focus on ways you can help everyone feel included.
- Discussing the different roles in the group project and who might take on which role.

- Reducing the demands of social communication by keeping in person meetings short or offering alternative communication options (such as messaging).

This challenge is common at the start of the teamwork project.

Challenge 2:

Scheduling problems- it may be challenging to find a time for the team to meet, or it may feel like one person is always compromising.

Possible Solutions:

- Consider using different options for meetings- zoom, messenger chats or email and try to be respectful of the different schedule's others may have. Also look at online collaboration tools such as Google docs, which can allow multiple people to work on a document at the same time.
- Consider sharing your availability with team members at the start of the project so everyone is aware of each other's schedule.

Challenge 3:

Different expectations- sometimes some team members are aiming for a high distinction (HD) while others may simply be aiming to pass. Or some people might like starting a project early while others wait until the last minute.

Possible Solutions:

- Early communication is very important in these situations. Perhaps it is possible to split the assignment into different parts and members of the team who like to do things early can complete that first, and then other members can complete other parts closer to the due date? Ensure you discuss these preferences openly and early with your group mates and keep your goals realistic. Compromise may be necessary in these situations.
- If different team members are wanting to achieve different grades, discuss this. Maybe instead of a HD, everyone aims for a Distinction or Credit. Or maybe each person completes a specific part of the project to the standard they want to be marked at. Recognise not everyone will want to put in the same amount of effort as you and instead consider how you can all come to an agreement. This is also likely to require compromise.
- You could say to your team "I *prefer to start the project early, so I am not rushing to meet the due date. Would it be possible for me to work on the part of the assignment due first so I can start it early?*"

Challenge 4:

One or two people dominating conversation

Possible Solutions:

- If you feel confident, politely call out the people who tend to be dominating the conversation. If you don't feel confident to do this in front of the team, speak to the person at the end of the meeting.
- Reflect on your own engagement with the group. Are you letting others have a say?

This may become a challenge during the early stages of the group work (the norming stage).

Challenge 5:

Some people not having the opportunity to speak up

Possible Solutions:

- If you feel your team is not giving you the opportunity to talk, try to talk to one of the members one-on-one about your concerns so you have someone who can help you when the group comes together. You can also send your team members an email expressing your concerns. If you have tried at least 2 different ways to express your concerns to the team and it hasn't worked, you can email your unit chair to ask for some help, using the email template for a staff member provided in the further resources chapter
- Use phrases such as *"could you please repeat that?"*, *"can we pause for a minute, I can't hear what anyone is saying"*, *"I noticed you haven't had a chance to speak [insert person's name], what do you think about this?"* or *"I don't understand the issue/ concept, could someone please explain?"*.

This may be something that happens early in the team assignment as members are getting to know each other.

Challenge 6:

Conflicting ideas over the project

Possible Solutions:

- Brainstorming all the ideas as a team so everyone can share their ideas, before voting on the key ideas.
- Refer back to the team 'rules' you created at the start and reflect on whether each

member is following these 'rules'.

This may be a challenge early in the project when everyone has lots of ideas about the project.

Challenge 7:

Team members not completing their tasks.

Possible Solutions:

- Discussing the team 'rules' together to ensure everyone clearly understands their part of the assignment.
- Using a compassionate approach when talking with and about team members. You may find it frustrating if they are not completing their role, but perhaps there is something else going on for them. Consider whether the meetings have been accessible (see 'Making your meeting accessible' in the communication chapter) and the team members role/ task is clear.
- If you have tried 2 different ways to solve the problem as a team, you can reach out to the unit chair for support, using the email template for staff members provided in the further resources chapter.

This is a challenge that may occur early in the group project, or it may be something that comes on as the project progresses.

Challenge 8:

Team members disengaging or not replying to communications.

Possible Solutions:

- Reach out to unresponsive members (using different medians- email, Messenger- if possible). See the template for emailing a team member in the further resources chapter. If you are still unable to reach them, consider discussing the problem with a staff member.
- If you are a team member who finds it difficult to reply to emails, ensure you communicate this to your peers. Perhaps if they want to reach you, a voice message is easier. Discussing this as early as possible is the best way to avoid any miscommunications, or emails being missed.

This might be a problem as the assignment progress and team members become busy with other assignments or lose track of email communications.

Challenge 9:

Not much focus on the task- Team members can easily become sidetracked.

Possible Solutions:

- It can be helpful to identify priorities for each meeting so that team members focus on these goals rather than becoming distracted with any conflict. This may look like a 'to do' list each meeting.

Challenge 10:

Uneven contributions- Sometimes it may seem like team members are not contributing to the project as much as others which can cause frustrations and tensions.

Possible Solutions:

- Ensure you set up clear role expectations in the first few meetings, so everyone has an equal role in contributing to the project. If members are not completing their tasks, be respectful when discussing this with them and use a compassionate approach to understand their reasoning. (They may not understand their role and be afraid to ask for help).

Challenge 11:

"Groupthink"- this is a concept that occurs when team members agree with other members to avoid any conflict. This can mean ideas are missed or some team members feel frustrated their ideas aren't heard.

Possible Solutions:

- It is helpful to brainstorm (or mind map) lots of possible ideas and then work as a group to evaluate which ideas are most suitable. It is also good to acknowledge the value in considering unconventional ideas that may initially seem too difficult or unreasonable.
- Break the task into smaller sections and focus on them one at a time.

Challenge 12:

Feelings of regret as the project ends.

Possible Solutions:

- Holding one final group meeting to reflect on the work you've done together and acknowledge your efforts.

- Have an informal catch-up, such as getting pizza or going for coffee, to provide a relaxed environment to debrief.
- It can also be helpful to complete the individual reflection or add your thoughts to the keep, stop, start padlet, which will help you to reflect on your experiences.

Interactive Activity: Now it's your turn!

Prompt to reflect on: Think about the challenges and solutions in the previous activity. Do you think they were helpful to consider? What are some other challenges you can think of? What are some solutions?

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=120#h5p-17

Activity Text Version
Reflect on the prompts above and type your responses in the text box below. You have the option to export and save it when you have finished.

Interactive Activity: What are some signs your team may be struggling?

Based on the challenges discussed above, and your own experience working in teams, reflect on the following prompt- **What are some signs your team may be struggling?**

Consider the overall productivity of the group, interactions with group members and what the overall quality of your project might look like.

You are welcome to add your reflections to the Mentimeter activity and reflect on what others have shared. Consider whether some of the solutions discussed in the activity above may be of benefit if you notice your team struggling.

Note, the numerical code for the Mentimeter activity won't work, so you will need to use the QR code on the page instead.

Access the Mentimeter Activity website.

The next chapter will provide some activities you can use to navigate disagreements as well as activities that may help develop your teamwork skills.

Key Takeaways

- You will understand some of the different challenges you may experience in a team and be able to list possible solutions.
- You will be able to reflect on what it might look like if your team is struggling.

Remember: Sometimes there are elephant-sized problems (really big problems), and sometimes there are ant-sized problems (small problems). **What may seem like an ant problem to you**

may feel like an elephant problem to someone else in your team. It is important to keep this in mind when you are experiencing challenges with those you are working with.

10.

ACTIVITIES TO STRENGTHEN TEAMWORK SKILLS

Learning Objectives

- Work through a range of activities with your teammates to scaffold discussions and strengthen teamwork skills.

Getting Started with the Project

No bad ideas…

There are no bad ideas when it comes to a team project, right?

Sometimes it can be challenging to know where to start with your project, so this activity is

designed to set you up for success, by allowing the team to have a laugh together and generate some ideas for the project.

For this activity, you will need a whiteboard, a large piece of paper or a digital collaboration tool like Google docs.

1. As a group, briefly discuss the topic your project is on, or the problem you are trying to solve.
2. Using the whiteboard or paper, have everyone write down their **worst** ideas. This might be something like 'copy an existing project', 'take a nap' or anything, really! There are only bad ideas!
3. Once everyone has written their ideas, step back and have a good laugh.
4. Discuss your favourite worst ideas.

You now have a starting point for your project; you know what you will *not* be doing/ working on as a team which now means you can start brainstorming some good ideas! This activity also helps your team to resist the urge to self-censor when it comes to good ideas, because all the bad ideas are already on paper.

The above activity has been informed by Atlassian (n.d).

Navigating Conflicts

This activity will help scaffold your discussion if you find yourself disagreeing as a team. If you can practice this activity early in the project, you will be better equipped to work through disagreement without a heated argument! It can also help you clarify ideas.

1. Discussing without arguing

Instructions:

- Agree the subject the team is to discuss (eg. one person not contributing as much to the project).

- Choose one or two people to present each side of the discussion. The rest of the team acts as an audience.

- While the discussion is held, follow these rules:

    - You can ask for clarification, but you can't disagree with what the other side has said
    - You can point out areas of agreement between the two sides, but you can't point out areas of disagreement.
    - The audience can't intervene in the discussion.

- After each side has had their chance to mount a case, the audience can join in by asking questions. They still can't argue or disagree.

Suggested time required: 20 – 30 minutes

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This next activity will help you to look at both sides of a conversation, so you can consider the situation from a different angle. The aim is to encourage insight into other person's point of view.

2. Making a case for the opposite

Instructions

This is a quick and simple way of trying to diffuse arguments between members in a team who disagree strongly.

- The two people who disagree literally swap seats.

- They then take turns to make a case for the opposite point of view (without being sarcastic).

- They try to reach a mutually acceptable decision, or to agree to disagree where practical

Suggested time required: 15 – 20 minutes

This final activity will help you to weigh up ideas or choose what to do. It is a good way of reducing discussions that keep going around in circles.

3. Pros and cons

Instructions

- List the competing ideas and divide up into pairs (A small group can list pros and cons as a whole group)

- Each pair lists the pros and cons of each idea

- Each pair then decides, based on the number and strength of the pros and cons, which ideas they think are the best.

- You come back together as a whole group, compare results and look for agreement.

Suggested time required: 15 – 20 minutes.

These activities can be useful to help you see a problem from a different perspective. Often, working in teams requires making a **compromise**.It can be very difficult and frustrating when you are so sure you have the right approach but no one else can see it. In a team, it is more important to be able to agree on a solution together than have one person making all the decisions, or always getting their way. Working together to resolve a conflict or issue is one of the most valuable team skills you can develop.

Interested in Trying More Activities with Your Team?

Access the 'Find the right Plays for your team website' to browse a range of different activities that you can complete as a team or in your classroom to strengthen your skills and ability to work thought challenging situations.

Key Takeaways

- Engaging in different activities with your teammates can help increase communication within the group and strengthen your ability to work constructively together.

These are some of the words you may have come across in this chapter:

Compromise

11.

AS THE PROJECT IS FINISHING

Learning Objectives

- To be able to reflect on your teamwork experiences.

Reflection

Once the project has finished, or is nearly finished, reflecting on what you have achieved is a great way to help continue to build your skills.

As a team, discuss your progress. Reflect on what you have achieved. Have one last meeting where you celebrate your efforts and reflect on what you learnt.
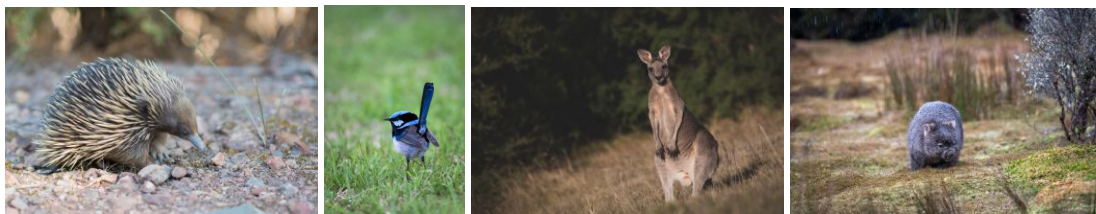
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Interactive Activity: Padlet

Reflect on your group project experience and consider the things you would like to 'keep' doing in future projects, things you would like to 'stop' doing, and things you might like to 'start' doing next time.

You are encouraged to add your contributions to the Padlet activity- 'keep, stop, start'. Scroll across or enable full screen mode to see all prompts.

Remember this is a public board so only share what you feel comfortable to and remember to be respectful of other responses.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=123#h5p-16

Interactive Activity: Individual Reflection

As well as reflecting as a team, it is also really important to reflect individually on what you got out of the project, and what you felt could be improved for next time. Type your reflections into the text boxes below. Once you have completed all of the questions, you have the option to download your responses and save for future.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=123#h5p-8

Activity Text Version

The prompts for the above activity are as follows:

- *What were my contributions to the product my team produced?*
- *What could I have done more of?*
- *What am I most proud of with this project?*
- *What did I learn from working in this team? (focus on the skills you developed, how you learnt from others etc.)*
- *What skills do I want to further develop? How can I do this in future?*

Key Takeaways

- Reflecting on your achievements and progress is a valuable part of teamwork. It is important to celebrate what you have achieved and congratulate each other on the work you have done.
- It is also helpful to look at ways you can improve or develop your skills for the future.

PART III
COMMUNICATION

In this section you will learn:

- What communication can look like;
- Ways to communicate with different team members;
- How to make your team meetings accessible and inclusive for everyone;
- How to advocate for yourself; and
- The importance of self-care.

This is a helpful chapter to refer back to throughout your team projects and into your future carers, as communication will be a valued skill in any job.

12.

COMMUNICATION STYLES

Learning Objectives

- To understand different types of communication.
- To be aware of communication differences when working in a neurodiverse team.
- To understand the accommodations you can make to support the communication styles of everyone in your team.

Interactive Activity: Communication Differences

Work through this interactive activity to develop an understanding of the types of communication, and how communication can be different in a **neurodiverse** team.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it

Activity Text Version

Interactive Activity: Communication Differences

This activity is an interactive book and invites students to read through the following information and learn about communication differences.

Before you begin:

These interactive activities will give you an understanding of, and insight into communication. Specifically, this section covers the different ways we communicate and how neurodivergent communication might differ to neurotypical communication.

How do we communicate?

Click on the image hotspots to learn more about the main ways we communicate.
The background image depicts a small, white terrier dog's face looking forward. The hotspots are located to the side of his face, on his eyes, nose and his ears, in an anticlockwise order.

- Written language is also form of verbal communication. This might be emails, texts or handwritten reminders. Dogs haven't yet advanced to this form of communication!
- Eye contact is another form of non-verbal communication.
- Some of our communication comes from speaking (verbal-communication). This is simply the words we are saying. Or, for this dog, it might be barking…
- Some of our communication is non-verbal- this might be hand gestures, tones, body language and facial expressions. Non-verbal communication actually makes up between 70-90% of the way humans communicate! Or, for dogs, their ears or their tail often give an indication of their intentions.

Neurodiverse communication:

Click through the follow categories to learn more about how communication may differ between neurotypical and neurodivergent people.

Neither way is right or wrong; both are perfectly valid methods of communicating. Learning about communication differences will help you to understand your peers and teammates better and ultimately help you all to work constructively together.

Stimming:

Stimming or self-stimulating behaviour is common among neurodivergent people. But really, everyone engages in stimming to some extent.

It can look like the repetitive use of an object, such as flicking a rubber band, picking your fingers, using a fidget toy, or actions such rocking or jumping.

Neurodivergent people often engage in stimming because it is enjoyable, it can help to reduce stress and anxiety, or it can help increase or reduce sensory input (e.g. focusing on one object may help reduce overwhelm associated with a loud environment). For someone with ADHD, movement may help them focus on what is being said.

Neurotypical expectations around communication usually see stimming or fidgeting as 'rude' or as though the person is not listening. This is not the case at all. Sometimes additional movement can help neurodivergent people absorb information. The same can also be true for neurotypical people.

This section was informed by the National Autistic Society (2020).

Eye Contact:

When communicating with someone, there is often an expectation that you will make eye contact to show you are listening.

However, for neurodivergent people eye contact can be particularly challenging, and some even describe it as physically painful. This may mean when you are communicating with a group member, they may prefer not to look you in the eyes. This is not them being rude, rather they are wanting to give themselves the best chance to process what you are saying to them (McGlensey, 2016).

If eye contact is something you find challenging, it can be helpful to let your group members know so they don't have that expectation.

If you are interested in learning more about eye contact and autistic people, check out the blog post by McGlensey (2016).

Tone:

Autistic people in particular may experience differences with tone. They may find it difficult to

interpret the tone of other people, and/or they themselves may speak with a 'flat affect' or have less changes in their tone when speaking.

This may mean they miss things like sarcasm or humour in a conversation. Or, when they speak, it may seem like they are not interested or engaged.

When working in your group, use clear and direct language. Listen to their words, not their tone.

If you are interested in learning more about tone, check out the article by Autistic Science Person (2021).

Small talk:

Neurotypical conversation often begins with small talk, such as questions about the weather, how a person's day is going or other neutral topics to ease into the conversation.

However, neurodivergent people may find small talk confusing, or they may prefer a more direct, factual conversation style.

In your meetings, be mindful of different communication preferences. Instead of traditional small talk, maybe you can discuss something you all enjoy or are passionate about. This could be the book/movie/tv show you are currently reading/watching, or something interesting you are learning about.

Masking:

Masking is something that neurodivergent people, or people in a minority group often engage in. Sometimes it occurs unconsciously, and sometimes it occurs consciously.

To some extent everyone engages in masking. For example, being a bit louder and more confident with friends, or speaking more formally and politely to grandparents. However, the form of masking described here, in the context of neurodivergence and specifically autism, is much more pervasive.

Masking is the process of adapting, changing or hiding ones natural behaviours or way of being in order to 'fit in' or appear 'socially acceptable'.

For autistic people, masking may look like suppressing stimming behaviours, forcing themselves to make eye contact, or ignoring overwhelming sensory stimuli. Long term consequences of masking might include exhaustion, maladaptive coping strategies, or burnout.

Masking is included here so that you can be aware of the importance of creating a safe group environment for peers to be themselves. Remember that how a group member presents in the project is not necessarily an indication of their functioning. They may leave the group environment and sleep for 3 hours because of how draining it was or they may leave and be overstimulated from trying to suppress all their energy and movement.

This section was informed by The Autistic Advocate (n.d)

Test your understanding:

Answer the following four questions to test your understanding by selecting either a) or b) as the correct response.

1. Eye contact is
   a) something you should expect from everyone in your team.
   b) something some people may struggle with. It is not always necessary in conversation.
   B was the correct answer!
2. If someone's tone suggests they are not interested in the conversation
   a) don't bother including them; they obviously don't want to know.
   b) listen to their words and focus on those instead.
   B was the correct answer!
3. Non-verbal communication makes up
   a) 70-90% of the way humans communicate.
   b) 10-30% of the way humans communicate.
   A was the correct answer!
4. If someone has different non-verbal cues to what you are used to (for example, less eye contact, minimal facial expressions),
   a) you will never be able to communicate effectively with them.
   b) that's okay! We all communicate in slightly different ways.
   B was the correct answer!

Well done! Now you've learnt something new!

It is important to look at the differences between neurotypical and neurodivergent communication so we can understand why everyone communicates differently. Unfortunately, sometimes we focus on these differences and decide "it's all too hard". This can lead to groups lacking understanding and a shared language when working together.

Team members can be excluded or ignored and overall, the team experience is generally negative.

So, what can we do about it?

Interactive Activity: Enhancing Team Communication

Work through the next activity to look at some ways simple ways you can enhance team communication. Remember, clear and direct communication is always the easiest way to ensure effective communication. The activity was informed by McCrum (2023) and Hamilton and Petty (2023).

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=134#h5p-24

Activity Text Version

Interactive Activity: Enhancing Team Communication

This interactive activity invites students to read the communication tip on each flip card, before clicking on it, to turn it over and learn more. There are six communication tips to learn about.

1. Use clear and direct language.

Where possible, avoid figures of speech such as "it's raining cats and dogs" as these can be interpreted literally. Sarcasm is not something everyone can understand.
Also try to avoid 'hidden agendas'. If you need something from someone, explaining clearly what you need.

2. Understand different types of non-verbal communication.

While the person may not be looking at you, or may appear disinterested, it is important to remember this could be their normal behaviour. There are also different ways we communicate non-verbally, and non-verbal communication may not always mean what we think. Listening to the person's words is most important.

3. Allow additional time to process information especially during meetings or when asking questions that require comments or answers.

Sometimes people might need more processing time.
Similarly, if someone is talking you, be patient and give them time to share their thoughts.

4. Be specific and clear about any issues or challenges you have with a team member.

Clearly and politely explain the problem and ensure the other person understands what you have said. Even though it may seem obvious to you, the other person may not see the problem. Most people, neurotypical or neurodivergent, can be sensitive to criticisms or corrections.

5. Consider the different learning needs in your team.

Complete reliance on written assessments can be challenging for someone with dyslexia. If someone discloses this in your team, they may feel more comfortable working on a part of the assignment that involves less writing.

Similarly, someone may prefer to take notes by hand instead of a laptop, or vice versa. Be aware of simple accommodations you can make to best support your whole team.

6. Reflect on your own biases and understandings.

Consider whether you have any particular biases about the people you are working with. This could be anything from their gender, their race, their neurotype, or their age. Consider whether this may be affecting (positively or negatively) how you interact with your teammates.

Interactive Activity: Test Your Understanding

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=134#h5p-25

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Activity Text Version

Interactive Activity: Test Your Understanding

This multiple-choice activity asks the following question:

Which two of the following are not beneficial ways of communicating with a team member?

1. Communicating what you find challenging when working in a team so other members understand why something might be harder for you.
2. Not communicating with someone in your team because they never sound interested in the project.
3. Expecting an immediate answer when you are talking to someone.

4. Considering whether you are being inclusive of all team members, even if they seem 'different' to yourself.

The correct answers are 2 and 3. Well done!

Key Takeaways

- Communication is part of every interaction we have.
- Communication can look different for everyone.
- It is important to be respectful and accommodating of different communication styles
- Using clear and concise language is always helpful!

These are some of the words you may have come across in this chapter:

Communication, **Masking**, **Neurodiverse**, **Stimming**

13.

MAKING MEETINGS ACCESSIBLE

Learning Objectives

- Have an understanding of what you can do to make your meetings more accessible for every team member.

What to Consider:

While you are working with your team to plan your meeting, it can also be helpful to think about ways to make the meeting **inclusive** and **accessible** for all members. Use the following questions as prompts to either reflect on individually or discuss as a group whether they would benefit your team.

These questions have been adapted from The Autism NOW Center (2013).

- **Is the meeting space accessible to everyone**?
    - Ensure the meeting space can be easily accessed (eg. easy for everyone to find and physically easy to get to), has comfortable seating options, and there are minimal distractions (eg. it is in a quiet area and the room itself does not have lots of busy decorations). Choosing somewhere central like the library or the engineering building is usually a good start.

- **Does everyone know what the meeting will be about prior to arrival?**

  ◦ Eg. Someone sends email or message in the group chat reminding everyone about the upcoming meeting and what will be discussed/ what the aim of the meeting is.
  ◦ Hint: if you discuss what will be covered at the *next* meeting each time you meet, this will already be covered!
  ◦ Understanding the *purpose* or the meeting also helps keep the group focused and on task and reduces uncertainty for those who like structure.

- **Have you made sure there are breaks during the meeting?**

  ◦ Especially if they are longer than an hour, sitting for long periods of time can be challenging for some people and decreases overall productivity.
  ◦ [Accessing the Pomodoro timer website](#) and using the timer there can be helpful to keep meetings on track and maximise productivity.

- **Has everyone had the opportunity to share their thoughts?**

  ◦ Some people may prefer to write something down instead of talking.
  ◦ If you notice someone hasn't had a chance to speak, find a way to include them in the conversation so they can have their voice heard. Some people don't like being put on the spot, so it may be better to talk to them 1-1 during a break, or after the meeting.

- **Is the meeting environment free from strong scents, loud noises and harsh lighting?**

  ◦ Be aware of the sensory environment for the meeting. This can include any strong scents such as perfumes, loud noises, or fluorescent lighting which may be uncomfortable for some team members.

- **Is the discussion moving too quickly for everyone to keep up?**

  ◦ As a group, be mindful of the speed of discussion. Sometimes talking really fast can be difficult for other members to keep up with, meaning they miss lots of information.
  ◦ At various points, it is good practice for a team member to briefly summarise the key points that have been raised so the whole group can understand.

- **Are you ensuring all forms of communication are accepted?**

- ◦ Remember everyone communicates in different ways: not everyone is comfortable with eye contact, some people have a flat affect (not outwardly indicating emotions), some people stim to regulate, some love to engage in small talk throughout a meeting. These differences are all valid and important.
- ◦ Look over the previous chapter titled 'Communication Styles' to deepen your understanding of this topic and reflect on any biases you may be holding towards your teammates.

- **If the meeting is online, have you discussed considerations as a team?**

  - ◦ If your meeting is online, consider what you can do to help everyone have a chance to speak. Do you use the raise hand function on zoom, nominate one person to run the meeting each time or use the chat function predominantly? Online meetings often require a few additional considerations, as opposed to in person meetings.
  - ◦ Have a discussion as a team about what you might all need when meeting online, or any suggestions that may help. Also consider discussing whether everyone will have their cameras on, if everyone has a working microphone and whether the meeting will be recorded if other team members are unable to attend.

Here is a PDF copy of this checklist for you to print and have available at your meetings if you want your own copy for reference: Making Meetings Accessible Checklist

Key Takeaways

- It is important to consider different needs when having a team meeting. Have a think about what you can do to help make others feel comfortable and also what you might need from others in your team.

These are some of the words you may have come across in this chapter:

Accessible, **Inclusive**

14.

SELF-ADVOCACY

Learning Objectives

- To understand what self-advocacy is and some ways to apply it to your life.
- To understand what self-care is and reflect on how you look after yourself.

Self- Advocacy

Self-advocacy is how we communicate our needs, wants and rights to access required accommodations or support (Hoey, 2024). Self-advocacy is important for everyone to understand to ensure they receive the appropriate support. No one else knows what you need better than yourself. So, recognising the reasonable accommodations you may need when working with others or in day-to-day life is an important skill to develop.

Interactive Activity: 5 Quick Ways to Self-Advocate

Use the interactive activity to learn 5 quick ways to self-advocate and help you high-five yourself! You can read more about each tip below.

> 📄 *An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*
> *https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/communication-teamwork-skills/?p=39#h5p-19*

Learn more about each tip by expanding the arrows:

1. Understand how your brain works

- Do you prefer visual, auditory, or written communication?
- Do you find yourself wanting to move around often?
- Do you find it challenging to talk to others?
- When you understand how your brain functions you are in a much better position to think about what your needs are. If you are unsure how your brain works you can use the 'Welcome to Me Resource' (found in the chapter 'How do you learn best?), ask family and friends for their thoughts, complete the provided learning quizzes or use Google to learn about the different ways people learn.

2. Know what reasonable accommodations you can ask for.

- Do you prefer all communication to be written down?
- Do you need a summary after each meeting?
- Do you need more stepped instructions?

- Would it be more helpful if the team met online? In a quieter space?
- Think about what might help make the team project more manageable for you. This does not mean you do less work than your teammates, but it might mean information is presented in such a way that it is easier for you to do your role. Talk to the Disability Resource Centre (DRC) about what specific accommodations may be available to you.

3. Know who to talk to about any supports or accommodations

- If you do not feel comfortable talking face-to-face to your team members about the accommodations you need, you can email or message them after the meeting with a written version.
- Also know the DRC is available to support you if you need, as is the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team. Links to all of these resources are available in the next chapter.
- Talking to your lecturers is also beneficial, especially if the accommodations you are asking for will be helpful for you to have in the classroom too.

4. Be polite but firm

- Continue to advocate for yourself in the team project in a polite but firm manner. If your team members are not respecting the reasonable accommodations you have made, you can discuss the situation with your tutor or unit chair.
- Before you go to your tutor or unit chair, ensure you have tried at least 3 times to advocate within your group. This may also include bringing a support person along to meetings or discussing the challenges with friends outside of the unit.
- Learning the skills to advocate for yourself is incredibly important so do ensure you try yourself first. However, it is also important to be able to ask for help if you are unable to access the supports you need on your own.

5. Practice

- Without practice, you will not be able to build your skills. It can be scary at first, but the more you advocate for what you need, the easier it will be become, and the more comfortable you will feel advocating for yourself in different environments.
- You can look through the reference list to find some more information, as well as using the email templates in the 'Further Resources' chapter.

Sometimes it can be difficult to know when, or if you need accommodations or supports, or if your rights are being supported by other students in your team. If you are unsure, or you

feel as though you are not supported in your team, it is best to talk to your lecturer or unit chair about how you are feeling.

Self-Care

Self-care encompasses any activates that feel good for you and have your wellbeing at heart. For some people this might be playing with a pet, exercising or catching up with friends. Self-care can also involve things we may not always *want* to do but are often necessary to maintain our health and wellbeing. This might be getting enough sleep, eating well, taking time to rest or visiting your doctor.

It is important to focus on the things you enjoy and to recharge your battery, particularly if you find working in a team environment or communicating with others challenging.

We have shared a few strategies that have worked for us throughout this book, think about what self-care looks like for you and feel free to share strategies that work for you.

Interactive Activity: Add Your Contribution to the Word Cloud

Reflect on the questions 'What does self-care look like for you?'

If you would like to, add your anonymous contribution to the Word Cloud.

Note- you will need to use the QR code to add your response, as the code will not work.

Key Takeaways

- Self-advocacy and self-care are both vital parts of working in a team. It is important to ensure your needs are met, and you are looking after yourself.

These are some of the words you may have come across in this chapter:

Self-Advocacy, **Self-Care**

IF YOU NEED HELP

What help is available to you?

Your peers:

- Discuss any problems with other teammates and peers to see if you can produce a solution together. You may need to be creative with your solutions; the chapters on 'Challenges of Teamwork' and 'Activities to Strengthen Teamwork Skills' can offer some guidance.

Your unit site:

- Here you can access the Discussion Board where you can post questions about the assignment (and see answers to other students' questions too).

- You can also access assignment information, the rubric and all your content here. Ensure you read the assignment information documents and rubric to see what is required.

- The unit guide will give you an overview of all the assignments for the unit, as well as their due dates.

- If you are needing an extension, or to apply for special consideration, more information can be found via the Deakin Life Blog.

Staff members:

- This might include your lecturer or unit chair.

- When contacting staff, try to do so during business hours (9am-5pm Monday to Friday) using the email address on the unit site.

- Allow at least 3 working days for the staff member to reply. If you have not heard anything after that, you can send a follow up email.

- Email templates are provided in the 'Further Resouces' chapter as a guide for any emails you send to a staff member.

- You can request a meeting with a staff member to discuss any concerns in person by sending them an email. When meeting a staff member, you can take notes, or your project work in with you. You can also go as a group. It is helpful to write down/ have typed some record of what you want to discuss, particularly if you are worried you will forget something.

- If you are uncomfortable speaking with your lecturer or unit chair, please contact the Disability Resource Centre at the following email: drcentre@deakin.edu.au

Further resources at Deakin

Click on each resource to learn more.

Disability Resource Centre (DRC)
The DRC can support students with any disabilities or conditions which may impact their study or participation in student life. More information and support can be found on the DRC website.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)
The DEI team work to create inclusive environments that celebrate diversity in a safe and respectful community. More information and support can be found on the DEI website.

IT support
For any IT related questions or support, follow the link to access self-help resources, book appointments or contact IT on their website.

Library Resources
The library at Deakin offers a broad range of support services for students, as well as access to online readings, bookable rooms for study and more.
For more information about the services on offer at the library, you can visit the library website.

Sunflower lanyards

The hidden disabilities sunflower lanyard is a globally recognised symbol that aims to highlight that not all disabilities are visible. Students and staff at Deakin can wear a green sunflower lanyard to indicate they have a hidden disability and may need extra time, help or understanding in certain situations. The white lanyard indicates you are showing your support and awareness for those with an invisible disability. Common invisible disabilities include depression, anxiety, autism, chronic pain and fatigue, obsessive compulsive disorder, sensory disabilities, and others.

Students and staff can learn more about the Hidden Disability Lanyard at Deakin, and request one for themselves through the Hidden Disability Sunflower @ Deakin: Learning Kit

Reset room

This is a reset room located in the library at each of the campuses at Deakin. The reset room is a space for students who may be feeling overwhelmed or needing a quiet space to help regain a sense of control. More information can be found at the reset room information page.

EMAIL TEMPLATES

The following templates are *suggestions* for how you could respectively approach either group or staff members with a problem. The information in square brackets [ ] should be edited to fit to your specific situation. Otherwise, the templates can be used as they are.

Templates for Emailing Your Group Members

Emailing a group member who you have not heard from:

{subject line}- [Title of assignment/ group project]

Hello [group members name],

I hope that you are well.

I am emailing regarding [*the name of the assignment/group work*]. Our group [*has started / is planning to start*] working on this assignment and we have not yet heard from you. Our main form of communication at the moment is [*provide details- eg. If a Messenger chat, send your Facebook name so the student can send you a friend request, email etc.*]. We are keen to hear from you to gain your input into this assignment.

Our next meeting will be [*details of your next meeting*], and we are hoping to see you there, or to hear back from you via email.

I look forward to your reply,

[*Your name*]

If you have not received a reply after 2 working days, it is reasonable to send the student a follow-up email. If the student still does not reply, you can then reach out to a staff member.

Templates for Emailing a Staff Member

Emailing a staff member with a question about the assignment:

{subject line}- Question regarding [*what assignment the question is about- eg. Question regarding AT1 for SLEXXX)*

Hello [*staff members name*],

I hope that your day is going well.

I am currently working on [*assignment name for the unit XXX*], and I have a question about [*insert what specific part of the assignment you are struggling with*]. I have already tried [*list **at least 2** things you have already tried to find the answer to your question- eg. the discussion board, reading the assignment information, talking to peers*].

Can you please [*clarify/ explain/ help me where to find information on*] this please?

I would be appreciative of any help you can provide,

[*Your name*]

E.g. I have a question about:

- how to submit the assignment.

- What [*specific assignment description means*]

- Where to find [*specific information*]

Make sure you have a thorough look through the assignment resources before emailing a staff member. The discussion boards are usually the best place to look first, as other people will likely have had the same question from you.

If you do email a staff member, give them at least 3 business days (eg. Monday-Friday) to reply.

Emailing a staff member about challenges with a group member:

{*subject line*}: Challenges with group member/*s*

Hello [*staff members name*],

I hope that your day is going well.

I am currently working on [*assignment name and unit code*]. I am finding it challenging to work with [*other members/ a member*] of my group. [*Given an example of why the group work is challenging. Examples below.*]. I/we have tried [*give at least one example of something you have tried to do to solve the problem already*]. [*I would be happy to discuss this in person with you.*]

I would be appreciative of any help you can provide,

[*Your name*]

E.g.

- A group member is not coming to your meetings
- A group member has not completed their agreed part of the assignment
- Other group members are not including you in discussions
- You have not heard from your group members

GLOSSARY

Accessible/ accessibility

Making sure that everyone can use and understand spaces, information, services, or programs.

Aids

Tools that help people with disabilities.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

A mental health disorder that affects your brain's executive functioning, as well as your ability to self-regulate and control your thoughts, words, actions and emotions. Also referred to as 'ADHD' or 'Variable Attention Stimulus Trait' (VAST)

Autism

A condition that affects how a person thinks, feels, interacts with others, and experiences their environment. Also referred to as 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' (ASD).

Communication

Communication is the process of transferring information from one person to another (or to multiple people). Communication can be verbal, non-verbal or written.

Communication (aids)

Tools that help people with speaking or writing, like text-to-speech.

Compromise

Where two parties/ people with opposing views are able to come to an agreement on a solution. Generally, this involves both parties/ people modifying their initial viewpoint to consider the other persons.

Disability

A condition which affects a person's body, brain, senses, or mind.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading.

Hidden (disabilities)

Disabilities that are not easily seen by others, like mental health, neurodivergence, hearing loss, or brain injury.

Identity-first language

recognises that disability is a part of who the person is. Identity-first language doesn't only describe the person's mind or body, but also the person's membership of a wider group of people. Eg. "Autistic person"

Inclusive/ inclusion

Making sure that everyone is treated fairly and can take part in the same activities or use the same spaces.

Masking

Masking is the process of adapting, changing or hiding ones natural behaviours or way of being in order to 'fit in' or appear 'socially acceptable'.

Medical model of disability

views disability as a defect within the individual

Mobility (aids)

Tools that help people to move around, like a walking stick or wheelchair.

Neurodivergence

When an individual's brain diverges or differs from what the society considers typical or 'normal'.

Neurodiverse

Comprising of both neurotypical and neurodivergent brains.

Neurodiversity

Is defined as "the diversity of human minds": the variation of functioning within our society; when multiple neurocognitive styles are represented in a group.

Neurotypical

Individuals whose neurocognitive functioning falls within the typical or 'normal' societal standards. Neurotypical is the opposite of neurodivergent.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

A condition where people address obsessions (such as fear of contamination or germs, or the need for order and symmetry) through compulsions (such as washing, checking, cleaning, counting, ordering and arranging). Also referred to as 'OCD'.

Person-first language

respects the personhood of people with disabilities. Person-first language puts the person before the disability. Eg. "Jane has schizophrenia"

Self-advocacy

How we communicate our needs, wants and rights to access required accommodations or support.

Self-care

Any activates that feel good for you and have your wellbeing at heart.

Social model of disability

believes that disability is caused by society being unwelcoming of people with an impairment or condition.

Stimming

The repetitive use of an object, such as flicking a rubber band, picking your fingers, using a fidget toy, or actions such rocking or jumping.

Strengths

Knowledges, attributes or characteristics of a person that are considered well developed, or something they are good at.

Teamwork

A group people working collaboratively and effectively together to achieve a common goal.

Visible (disabilities)

Disabilities that are easily seen by others, like amputation; or are seen because of aids, like a wheelchair or an assistance animal.

Weaknesses

Knowledges, attributes or characteristics of a person that are considered less developed, or something they are not yet good at.

VERSIONING HISTORY

This page provides a record of changes made to this textbook. Each set of edits is acknowledged with a 0.01 increase in the version number.

If you find an error, please contact n.milne@deakin.edu.au or siva.krishnan@deakin.edu.au

Version	Date	Change	Details
1.01	March 2025	Original Version	

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