

# Group Roles: Maximizing Group Performance

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## How can you maximize group performance?

A diversity of skills and ideas within your group often enriches the group process and can improve the final product. However, working with others who are different from us can be challenging.

One way to structure the functioning of your group and take advantage of each other's strengths is to assign team roles within your group. These team roles can be assigned based on everyone's strengths or rotated periodically to help each member better understand the roles and themselves as team members.

There are four fundamental roles that can be identified in a group:

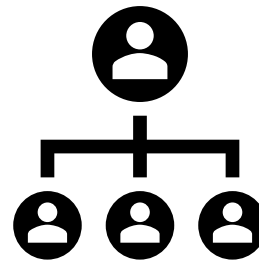
- Leader or facilitator
- Arbitrator or Monitor
- Notetaker or timekeeper
- Devil's advocate

For larger groups, some of these roles can be divided between two students.

## The roles:

### Leader or facilitator

- Clarifies the objectives of the group and helps the group establish sub-goals at the beginning of each meeting. (The sub-goals should serve as an agenda of topics to be covered during the meeting).
- Ensures that all group members understand the group's concepts and conclusions.
- Starts meetings, introduces each topic, and keeps the group engaged and focused on the goals.
- Ensures that the group completes its tasks before the deadline.



#### Typical phrases:

- 🗨️ "Thanks for your contribution, Thomas. What do you think, Kim?"
- 🗨️ "From what I hear, the main points seem to be A, B and C. Why don't we start with A if everyone agrees?"
- 🗨️ "So, it seems we all agree that ..."

## Arbitrator or monitor

- Observes group functioning carefully and initiates regular discussions on group climate and process, especially if he or she senses tension or conflict brewing.
- During disagreements or conflicts, clarifies the arguments, and proposes suggestions for resolving dispute.
- Ensures that all group members have a chance to participate and learn; may elicit comments from members if they are not participating.
- Acts as a cheerleader for the group whenever possible, praising members for work well done



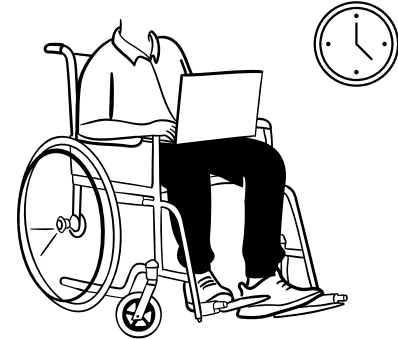
### Typical phrases:

- ④ "We haven't heard much during our meeting from you, John. Do you have any thoughts?" "It might be helpful if you backed off a bit, Kate, so we can hear what Doug has to say."
- ④ "I'm sensing a bit of tension among us over this decision; I think we should get our disagreements out into the open."
- ④ "I think we can feel really good about what we've accomplished to this point. Especially nice work on the project outline, Kim!"

*Note:* For larger groups the role of "encourager" could be done by a different student.

## Notetaker or timekeeper

- Takes notes during meetings to keep a record of what has been decided, tasks that have been assigned, when meetings are scheduled, etc.
- Summarizes discussions and decisions for the rest of the group. Distributes a summary of each meeting to all group members.
- Presents group material to the rest of the class/supervisor.
- Keeps track of time during meetings to avoid spending excessive time on one topic. This is best handled by deciding how much time will be allocated to each issue in the agenda and letting everyone know when this time is up. It is also useful to point out when time is almost up so that issues can be wrapped up appropriately.



### Typical phrases:

- 🌀 "Hold on, please, I just need to get this down before we move on."
- 🌀 "I'll send you an updated version of our report tomorrow, along with a summary of today's meeting."
- 🌀 "We've spent about 15 of the 20 minutes we allocated to this topic, so we've got about 5 more minutes to sort it out."

*Note:* For larger groups, the roles of notetaker and timekeeper could be fulfilled by two students.

## Devil's advocate

- Remains on guard against “groupthink” scenarios (i.e., when the pressure to reach the group goal is so great that the individual members surrender their own opinions to avoid conflict and view issues solely from the group’s perspective).
- Ensures that all arguments have been heard, and looks for holes in the group’s decision-making process, in case there is something overlooked.
- Keeps his or her mind open to problems, possibilities, and opposing ideas.
- Serves as a quality-control person who double-checks every detail to make sure errors have not been made and searches for aspects of the work that need more attention. Keeps an eye out for mistakes, especially those that may fall between the responsibilities of two group members.



### Typical phrases:

- 🌀 "Let's give Mike's idea a chance."
- 🌀 "OK, we've decided to go with plan C, but I noticed that we still haven't dealt with the same problem that plan A didn't address. What can we do to solve this?"

*Note:* For larger groups, this role of devil's advocate could be divided into two roles: devil's advocate and quality control.



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