

Chapter 6: All Together Now: Team Presentations

This chapter answers these questions:

1. Why are teams important?
2. Why do students dislike teamwork?
3. How do teams evolve?
4. What strategies can facilitate your team's ability to function well?
5. What strategies can facilitate the delivery of your team's presentation?

Stick Figure 6.1: Stick figure panicking as it is handed a class assignment that reads, 'for your team project, you are required to...'

If you think solo presentation assignments are challenging, how will you react when you are given a *team* presentation assignment? Although all the same rules for designing and delivering a solo presentation still apply, now you and your teammates have the extra challenge of learning how to work together as a team to deliver one product—your team presentation. As you may have learned from previous experience, working alone and working with a team are two entirely different experiences.

First, don't be afraid to admit that team assignments may not be your first choice on the menu of fun things to do. Most students dread working as a team with their classmates, not because they think poorly of their classmates, but because they've learned from previous experience that teamwork can be fraught with frustration. In fact, some students routinely try to avoid teamwork, pleading or demanding to be given the opportunity to work alone. If this describes you, even in your dreams, take heart: you're not alone in feeling this way, but keeping a few simple rules and strategies in mind, you can turn your current team experience into a meaningful—and productive—learning experience.

Why Are Teams Important?

You might notice that we keep using the word "team" instead of "group"—why? Even if your instructor has asked you to "work in groups," she or he is really asking you to interact as a team. A team consists of two or more individuals who work interdependently toward a common goal (think of your favorite sports team). Groups, on the other hand, often don't have a common goal, often don't work together, and sometimes don't even know each other (think of a group of people riding together on an elevator).

Today most organizations require employees to collaborate in teams to complete many different tasks. As such, not only is it important that you learn how to work together as part of a team, it is important that you learn how to work *well* together as part of a team. One definition of a successful team is one in which the team members are willing to work together on future projects after the current task is completed. While you may never collaborate with your current classmates again (in fact, you may never even see these people again after this class is over), you

will see your fellow employees repeatedly, and you'll need appropriate skills and strategies to collaborate effectively and productively on a daily basis.

Besides learning valuable team skills, you can take advantage of that old adage, "two heads are better than one." Having two or more people brainstorm on the same presentation topic usually leads to more creative ideas of what to present and how to present it. In addition, there is the extra benefit of having more than one person to carry the workload, no small thing to consider in light of your busy schedule.

Why Do Students Dislike Teamwork?

Stick Figure 6.2: Stick figure representing the social loafer (figure that is loafing on a sofa eating chips and watching TV while other little figures are trying to drag the sofa along with them with ropes)

Why, then, do students groan when they are asked to deliver a team presentation? Most students have had a wide range of negative experiences with former teammates. You might recall the shrinking violet—that uninvolved or under-confident teammate who never seemed to "turn on." Then there's the curse of the social loafer or free rider, the easygoing (or maybe not so easygoing) teammate who wanted to blend into the team environment and receive the team grade by doing little—or none—of the team's work. You can't forget your favorite—the dominator. Here's a character who couldn't stop telling others what or how to do it, even when the others want to tell her or him where to go. These types of teammates can make teamwork a rugged road to follow, but the good news is that there are ways to work (constructively) with them to overcome difficulties.

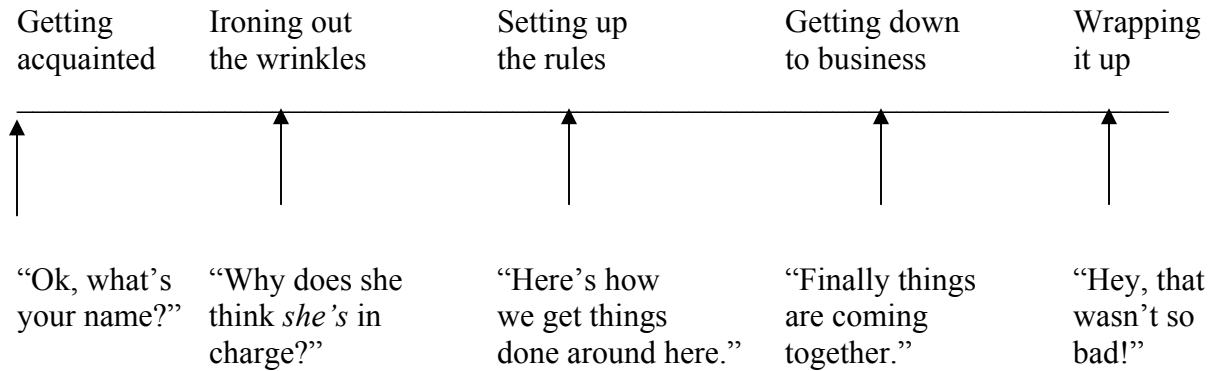
Finally, some students recall the extra work that inevitably seems to accompany teams, such as the extra meeting time, extra communication (or miscommunication), extra time needed to pull together different students' efforts into one project, and/or the struggle to work with students who are geographically dispersed. No wonder students groan when the instructor has the bright idea of "group presentations"!

Stick Figure 6.3: Stick figures trying to talk with each other using tin can telephones, each yelling 'What?! What?'

How Do Teams Evolve?

Before you begin to develop your team, take a few minutes and think about the teams on which you've been in the past. Did they seem to go through "peaks and valleys"? Most likely, you have experienced both highs and lows on teams, and this is not unusual. In fact, teams, like people, have long been thought to go through stages of development (Tuckman, 1965).

Figure 6.1: General Stages of Team Development*



* adapted from Tuckman (1965)

In the beginning, team members need time to get to know each other, and there is usually some uneasiness on everyone’s part. As team members become acquainted, many teams experience a period of conflict as team leader(s) emerge, and team members may have trouble adjusting to (or putting up with) one another. As team members become familiar with the team, spoken and unspoken team rules are put into place, shaping “how we things get done.” Finally, after the team moves through all of these stages, it can focus on accomplishing its task—most of the “interpersonal stuff” of working together has been addressed, for better or for worse.

The main point here is that the foundation for a successful team experience is laid before any effort is put forth on the team presentation. Most teams don’t understand this; they rush into the task, focused on the product (in your case, the team presentation) instead of on the process (the interactions in which team members engage as they ready the team presentation). However, observations of effective teams suggest that team members have figured out both how best to work together and how best to finish their final product—together. Although the final product is important successfully managing the process is at least three-fourths, if not more, of a successful presentation.

What Strategies Will Facilitate Your Team’s Ability to Function Well?

Effective teams don’t just happen, they have to be created. How will your team learn to interact effectively? Consider using the following strategies:

Create and implement ground rules

Stick Figure 6.4: Stick figure chiseling tablets with the words ‘ground rules’ written on them

Before your team begins to develop the presentation, ask team members to take a few minutes and describe their previous team experiences—both positive and negative. If team members’ experiences were mostly positive, ask them to describe factors that contributed to this success. If their experiences were mostly negative, ask team members to identify reasons why

the team process and/or team members' relationships deteriorated. As previously mentioned, most team experiences are a mix of positive and negative experiences. To repeat the positive experiences and minimize the negative experiences in this new team, ask team members to consider how they can translate what they've learned into a set of ground rules for the team.

The idea of team ground rules has been around for a long time and has worked for many different types of teams. These rules are created by the team members for their own team based on their own past experience and expectations, and as such, each team's rules will be different—there is no one “right” set of ground rules. However, there are a few common themes found in ground rules that appear to help most teams, and you might consider these themes to get your team started:

1. What **expectations** does the team have for team member participation? Your team might answer this question by asking the following: Is each member expected to participate? To what extent? What will the team do if someone doesn't participate or carry his or her fair share of the workload? How will the team handle the team member who over-participates (dominates) in conversations? How about the team member who under-participates (is shy or unconfident) in the team tasks?
2. How is **respect** for each team member evident in the team? Many teams develop rules stating that team members' ideas, feelings, and time will be respected. Your team might want to think about respect in these terms and create rules that reflect the idea of respect. For example, is it important that everyone arrives at team meetings on time and prepared so that other members don't waste their time? Is it important that each member listens to others' ideas before dismissing them or talking over them?
3. How will the team handle **conflict**? Although creating ground rules will minimize the amount of conflict your team experiences, it is not guaranteed to eliminate it. Ground rules can help teams work through difficult times, particularly if the team decides up front how they will handle conflict. Some ideas for this might include deciding in advance that any arguments will be handled in person instead of over e-mail or that all team members will take a day to “cool off” before attempting to work through a problem.
4. What **special concerns** are important to the team? Because all teams have members with different needs and different circumstances, there might be some concerns that are especially important to one or more members. For example, some members may live off campus—perhaps even a long way from campus. How will this affect their team participation? Are there any students with special needs who will be part of the team? If so, what can the team do to adjust to these needs?

Communication: The Foundation of a Strong Team

Stick Figure 6.5: Stick figures standing together in a line with their arms around each other on a foundation labeled 'communication'

Communication among team members is essential to the success of your team effort. In most cases, teams that “crash and burn” (decided to keep the crash and burn phrase...?) do so because the team members either don't communicate or don't communicate effectively. Here are a few strategies to help your team communicate:

1. At your first meeting, create a list of each team member's **contact information**, including home, work, and cell phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. Have each team member identify the best time and place they can be reached. Be honest with each other—if the best time and place for one member to be reached is later in the evening or before leaving for work in the morning, make sure all team members are aware of this.
2. If your contact information and/or the information about your best time and place to be reached **changes** before the presentation has been given, tell your teammates—immediately.
3. **Copy** each member on all presentation-related e-mails. This will keep everyone informed about all progress made on the team presentation and avoid having team members feeling “left out of the loop.”
4. Don't make **decisions** for the team on your own. For example, if you decide to ask the instructor to change your presentation due date or change any of the presentation requirements, talk with all team members and get their agreement first. Making decisions for other team members without their knowledge or consent is a sure way to create team conflict.

Manage those team meetings

Stick Figure 6.6: Stick figure sitting around a table arguing with each other

Your team will most likely have to meet at least once, if not many times, to prepare the presentation. Using the following strategies will help to keep your team meetings focused:

1. Encourage team members to decide the **purpose** of the meeting by e-mail in advance. This can be as simple as members distributing e-mails to each other saying, for example, ‘On Tuesday, I think we should discuss the slides and handouts. What else do we need to address?’ Be sure to include each member's contributions to the meeting purpose and distribute a completed purpose before your team meets so that everyone knows what will be discussed. This will work much better than if everyone agrees to show up on Tuesday “to meet about the presentation,” and, when people finally all arrive, valuable time and patience is spent trying to decide how to get started.
2. As your team begins the meeting, **reconfirm the purpose** of your meeting. This will cue everyone into the fact that: 1) there IS a purpose for this meeting, and, 2) the purpose will be used to guide the meeting. You might want to start by saying, ‘We've decided to talk about slides and handouts today. Is this still a good use of our time?’

3. When your team starts to drift off focus, **review the purpose** of your meeting: “Well, okay, I know that our instructor has some interesting habits, but let’s keep our focus on our ideas about what to include in our presentation.”
5. Assign a team member to keep **meeting notes** (you’ll probably want to rotate this job so no one feels overwhelmed) and ask this person to distribute the notes to every other member as soon as possible after the meeting. This will help everyone remember what happened during the meeting—and help remind them of what they said they would accomplish before the next meeting.

Face conflict between team members

Stick Figure 6.7: Stick figures jumping up and down in a rage.

Your team can follow all the strategies mentioned and still encounter conflict between team members. Don’t give up; your team can still salvage both the relationships between team members and its ability to deliver a great presentation—if your team can agree that, 1) there IS a conflict (as opposed to trying to ignore the problem), and, 2) the conflict can be addressed constructively. Once your team decides to bring the conflict out in the open, team members will be in position to discuss problems honestly and identify solutions. Here are a few ideas to help your team get started:

1. First, team members need to **calm down**. Conflict typically makes people feel anxious and upset, and no one can think clearly in this frame of mind. Ask every team member to take time—alone—to reflect honestly on the situation. Why did the conflict occur? What kind of compromise can be reached? What kind of solutions can each team member individually identify?
2. As a team, review your team’s **ground rules**, and if necessary, add new ground rules that address the problem and the solution. For example, if your team experiences difficulty because one team member refuses to carry her fair share of the load, refer back the ground rule(s) that address team member participation. As a team—and this means your team needs to *include* the team member who refuses to carry her fair share of the load in your conversations—discuss the meaning of the words “fair share” and why they are important. What is everyone’s interpretation of these words, and why? What can be done at this point to even out the workload among members? Remember that everyone is getting a grade for this assignment, so everyone should contribute. You are on solid ground if you point out that someone is slacking off.
3. **Listen, then speak**. This idea has two parts. First, don’t talk (or shout) until you listen—really listen—to what the other team member(s) has to say. Then speak when it’s your turn to do so. Hearing nothing because you are too busy espousing your opinion—or saying nothing just to go along with the crowd—are two ways to avoid, not resolve, the conflict. It is every team member’s responsibility to work actively and constructively toward resolving your team’s conflict.

4. **Ban destructive communication.** Complaining about one person behind her or his back to the other team members doesn't solve anything—in fact, it only makes things worse. A variation on this unproductive theme is to approach the instructor to complain about one or all of your teammates. Instructors expect team members to resolve team conflict themselves, so be prepared to do so.
5. **Give your best effort.** Sometimes your team tries to resolve conflict and the resolution isn't to everyone's satisfaction. People have different personalities, different experiences, and different expectations, and team ground rules are not going to change this reality. If each team member has given his or her best effort toward resolving the conflict, even if it isn't completely resolved, your team is ahead of where it was. Remember, this is a learning process for each team member; learning means change, and change is often uncomfortable. Give it your best effort and learn from the results.

What Strategies Can Facilitate the Delivery of Your Team's Presentation?

Before your team's presentation day arrives, take some time to consider the “extras” that will make your team presentation outstanding:

Have Plan “B” ready

Stick Figure 6.8: Stick figures holding up a paper with the words, ‘plan B’ written on it.

Team presentations require members to think on their feet. This means that team members have to be flexible and ready to adapt to unexpected challenges or problems. Try to think creatively about what might happen unexpectedly and how team members might handle it. But be warned—your team won't be able to anticipate every unexpected challenge; a good sense of humor goes a long way when the unimaginable happens.

However, team members can anticipate quite a few possible problems and have a strategy ready to enact should these problems arise. Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. **Prepare for the No-Show.** One “worst case scenario” is that one of your team members is avoidably—and quite unexpectedly—detained from attending your presentation. There is less of a need for concern if your team has a backup plan for this situation. Have team members prepare different parts of the presentation so that each part has a “lead” and an “understudy.” This doesn't have to be a huge ordeal; simply ask each person serving as an understudy to become familiar with the key points on the slides and think how they would address these points. Believe us on this one: if you end up needing an understudy and no one is prepared, your team will kick itself in the morning.
2. **Make extra copies.** Have an extra set of handouts and slides “just in case.” Your understudy person can be responsible for the extra slides and/or handouts for his or her section. The idea here is that even though something has gone terribly wrong, no one needs to know as your team presents an “A+” presentation.

3. **Meet prior to presentation time.** If possible, plan to meet as a team shortly before presentation time to be sure all members and materials are present and ready. This will give you extra time to enact your backup plan should either members and/or materials turn up missing.

Every transition is an opportunity for confusion

Stick Figure 6.9: Stick figures standing in a line, asking each other, “who’s on first, who’s on second???”

Transitions between one presenter and the next can offer some special challenges. As you might have learned from previous team presentations, every transition is an opportunity for confusion among team members waiting to happen. Consider the following:

1. **Limit transitions.** Design your presentation delivery so it limits the number of transitions between team members. Some teams make their audience members dizzy because they switch back and forth so many times (for example, “Calvin is going to introduce everyone, then Jim is going to introduce the topic, then Calvin will discuss how we collected our information, then Jane will talk about what we did with the information, then Calvin will summarize that section, then Jim...!). One transition per group member is a good rule of thumb.
2. **Practice your transitions.** It is painfully obvious to the audience (including the instructor) when team members have not practiced transitions. Poor transitions can undermine an otherwise solid presentation because it appears to the audience that the presentation is disjointed. One common “no-no” occurs when the current presenter says, “And next, Bob will talk about the pros and cons...” only to have confusion break out among the teammates. Finally, Amy hesitantly stands and says, “Uh, that’s my part...” Another common “no-no” occurs when the current speaker finishes his section and then stares blindly toward his teammates, “Uh, next, uh, I guess we’ll, uh...” Treat your transitions with the respect they deserve.
3. **Make a transition slide.** If you are using overheads or PowerPoint slides, consider displaying a transition slide between presenters. This slide can be designed so that it doesn’t reveal the details of what the next person is going to talk about, but creates anticipation and interest. It also keeps your team’s screen from going “blank” as the next presenter is preparing to speak.

You’re still “on” even when you’re not presenting

Even when you personally are not presenting, if your team is presenting, you are still “on.” Decide in advance what team members will do when they are not speaking. For example, will team members sit together in the front of the room or on the side of the room? Which team member will be responsible for turning slides or directing the computer mouse? How will the question and answer period be handled? Be sure that team members who are not currently speaking don’t detract attention away from the speaker by fidgeting, rustling paper, tapping pens

or feet, or playing with the laser light pointer. Remember, actions speak louder than words, and if your teammates present a professional stance at all times during the presentation, they will verbally—and nonverbally—communicate to the audience, “We’re professionals.”

Acknowledge your team’s hard work

Figure 6.10: Stick figures slapping each other on the back, clapping, and smiling.

When your team finishes the team presentation, congratulate each other. You’ve probably spent quite a bit of time together, and even if some things didn’t go exactly as planned, you’ve learned from each other and (hopefully) you’ve shared meaningful material with your audience. These things deserve a round of applause.

Stick Figure 6.11: Stick figure ‘wrapping up’ a box labeled, ‘team presentations.’

Wrapping It Up

Teams

Teams are an important part of everyday life, at school and on the job. A team consists of two or more individuals who work interdependently toward a common goal. Teamwork can lead to increased creativity in developing presentation ideas and can lighten each team member’s workload, but teamwork can also lead to frustration when team members shirk responsibility, dominate conversations, and need extra time and effort to coordinate with each other. Like people, most teams evolve over time. Most team members need time to become acquainted and to decide how they will work together before they can develop and deliver their presentation.

Team Strategies

Effective teams don’t just happen—they have to be created. Strategies to help you and your teammates create an effective team include developing ground rules, following procedures to help you communicate as a team, managing team meetings so they are as productive as possible, and constructively resolving conflict. Ground rules are rules created by team members to help them interact more effectively. Common themes in ground rules include making team members’ expectations for participation explicit, showing respect for all team members’ thoughts and feelings, addressing conflict in a forthright and constructive manner, and identifying any special concerns that team members may have. Procedures to help your team better communicate include exchanging complete contact information among team members, immediately reporting any changes in contact information to team members, copying all team members on all presentation-related e-mails, and making decisions that affect the team as a team. Managing team meetings include deciding in advance on the purpose of the meeting, reconfirming this purpose once the meeting is underway, reviewing this purpose if your team loses focus, and recording meeting notes and distributing them to each team member. Conflict may be resolved by asking all team members to calm down, reviewing the team ground rules, listening carefully to all sides of the argument, placing a ban on destructive communication, and giving your best effort.

Presentation Day Strategies

Before your team's presentation day arrives, consider strategies that will help your team do its best. These strategies include preparing in advance for the no-show team member by asking each team member to become familiar with not only their own section, but one additional section of the presentation, having an extra copy of handouts, slides or any other materials on hand, and meeting shortly before presentation time to ensure that all members and material are ready. Transitioning between one presenter and the next can offer some special challenges. Your team can rise to these challenges by limiting the number of transitions between team members, practicing your transitions, and, if you are using overhead or PowerPoint slides, displaying transition slides between presenters to maintain the flow of the presentation. Don't forget, if any member of your team is presenting, you are still "on" even if you are not front and center. Decide in advance what team members will do when they are not speaking, and remember that while your team is presenting, the audience is listening to both verbal and nonverbal messages from all of the team members. Finally, when your team is finished, acknowledge team members' hard work.

Key Terms And Ideas From This Chapter

Communication	No Show
Conflict	Plan "B"
Contact information	Professionalism
Contact information – changes to	Remaining calm
Copies – extra set	Respect
Decisions	Shrinking violet
Dominator	Social loafer
Effort	Special concerns
Expectations	Teams – advantages of
Ground rules	Teams and the workplace
Listening	Teams – development of
Meetings	Teams – disadvantages of
Meeting notes	Transitions

Putting Thoughts into Practice

As your team evolves and your presentation begins to take shape, use these checklists to measure your individual progress, your team's progress, and to identify areas for improvement:

AS A TEAM MEMBER, HOW AM I DOING?

Do I/Did I....	Yes or No?	If Not, What Can I Do Now?
Contribute to the development of our team's ground rules?		
Tell my team members about my expectations for their team participation?		
Show respect for my team members' thoughts and feelings – even if they are different from my own?		
Mention my unique needs or circumstances and ask my team members about theirs?		
Provide my teammates with my complete contact information?		
Tell my teammate about changes in my contact information?		
Copy my teammates on my e-mails that relate to our presentation?		
Talk with my teammates before making a decision about the presentation on my own?		

AS A TEAM, HOW ARE WE DOING?

Do We/Did We....	Yes or No?	If Not, What Can We Do Now?
Discuss the purpose of our team meetings in advance?		
Come fully prepared to participate in team meetings?		
Take and distribute notes from our meetings to each teammate?		
Calm down when we first experienced a conflict?		
Review and implement our ground rules when we experienced a conflict?		
Listen and consider all sides of a conflict?		
Ban destructive communication from our team?		
Give our best effort to constructively address conflict among teammates?		

ARE WE READY TO PRESENT AS A TEAM?

For Our Presentation Day, Have We/Will We...	Yes or No	If Not, What Can We Do Now?
Adequately prepare in case one of our teammates is a no-show?		
Make extra copies of our presentation material, just in case we needed it?		
Meet shortly before our presentation to be sure members and materials were ready?		
Design our presentation so it limits the number of transitions between teammates?		
Practice our transitions?		
Make transition overheads (if using overheads)		
Decide in advance what teammates will do when they are not speaking but the team is presenting?		

References

Tuckman, B. W. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. Psychological Bulletin, 63, 384 – 399.