



# Tips for Teamwork

## Guidelines for Rotman Commerce Students

### Get to know your teammates

Teams that spend time developing trust, cohesion and a positive work environment perform more successfully. Frequent, collaborative discussions and transparent communication can be even more important than the skill levels of individual team members. Set aside time to get to know your teammates at the beginning of your project and continue to build on those relationships.

- Complete a Team Skills Audit: Download the Centre for Professional Skills (CPS) Team Skills Audit from the [Rotman Commerce Teamwork website](#) and [watch our CPS Team Skills Audit tutorial on YouTube](#) to uncover the strengths your teammates bring and other considerations you need to keep in mind for your project.

### Have a Team Contract / ground rules

Team Contracts are designed to make sure your team starts off on the right foot. Download the CPS Team Contract from the Rotman Commerce Teamwork website to help start conversations and establish effective team practices, like the following:

#### Ground Rules

Ground rules are statements that set out the expectations and behaviours for how a team will work together. Here are two key things to remember when creating ground rules:

- **Make them specific and realistic:** Avoid statements like “*Communicate often*”, which is a great sentiment but doesn’t provide any guidance. Instead, try something like “*Post an update on Slack on Monday after our lecture, and respond to any messages within 24 hours*”.
- **Keep them positive:** Try to rephrase your “*don’t...*” ground rules to highlight behaviours you *do* want to see. Instead of “*Don’t be late to team meetings*”, try “*Be on time to team meetings, or send a group message on Slack if you will be more than 5 minutes late*”.

### Make your meetings count

Whether in person or virtual, effective team meetings are crucial. Here are some tips for doing them well:

- **Schedule regular short meetings:** Regular meetings help with team cohesion, discussion, collaboration, and keeping teammates accountable.
- **Send meeting agendas:** Have a few key questions or points that you want answered or addressed in the meeting and send them in advance so everyone can come prepared with their ideas.
- **Plan for multiple ways of contributing:** Different people have different styles of participating and communicating. Don’t expect everyone to jump in straight away, or when called on. Allow time for people to think, write down their ideas, or otherwise warm up to the discussion.
- **Outline next steps & send a follow-up:** At the end of the meeting, have the recorder or note-taker summarize the decisions made and clarify next steps for each person—and follow this with an email.

### Have a project management plan

- Keep an up-to-date record of tasks and due dates accessible to all your teammates (try a shared/editable Google Doc or Gantt chart, or a platform such as [Monday](#), [Asana](#), [Trello](#), etc.).

- Social media platforms (iG, WhatsApp, WeChat, etc.) are a great way to make connections, but not ideal for sustained team communication. Try apps/platforms designed for professional project communication, such as Slack or Discord (or just your UofT email!)

## Assign Group Roles

Use roles for accountability, and to allow for a diverse set of ideas and voices. You can assign roles based on teammates' strengths and skills, or rotate roles to develop new skills. Here are some that we've found useful:

- **Facilitator:** Moderates the group. Organizes agendas, encourages and enables everyone to contribute, and looks for opportunities to probe deeper.
- **Critic/Devil's advocate:** Looks for valid weaknesses or holes in ideas and arguments. Does not necessarily hold the position they take but does so to strengthen the argument.
- **Materials Manager:** Keeps and distributes the materials. Responsible for setting up, sharing, and monitoring shared folders, project management platforms, and organizing additional documents (templates, rubrics, readings etc.).

*(Group Roles adapted from Barkley et al, 2014)*

## Plan Tasks Effectively

Make a workplan that has room for error (it will always take longer than you expect!), and which respects everyone's constraints and schedules. Here are some tips:

- **Avoid domino effects:** Try to ensure that tasks can be completed at the same time, rather than having someone's work dependent on what others in the team are producing.
- **Check for understanding:** Make sure everyone on the team has a clear understanding of what they need to do, how to do it, and when they need to have it completed by.
- **Set plausible deadlines:** Work backwards from the final deadline, set interim deadlines for the group and for yourself, and build in more time than you think you'll need for discussion, feedback, and review. Make sure deadlines work for everyone.
- **Avoid "divide and conquer":** True collaboration requires everyone's input at all levels—avoid workplans that merely divide up the sections of the project and stitch them together at the end.

## When dealing with conflict or disagreement...

- **Resolve disagreements in person** (or in a virtual meeting), not over text/email/IM.
- **Reach out and offer support** if a teammate's work doesn't meet your expectations or is late.
- **Be generous in your interpretations of teammates' actions.** Avoid making assumptions about your teammates' motivations (i.e., they're lazy, disorganized, etc.).
- **Be curious:** Avoid judging your teammates' behaviour based on your own expectations (e.g., they're quiet so they must not have anything to say; they keep interrupting me so they must not value my ideas, etc.). Instead, openly discuss how you can adapt your behaviour to work better together.
- **Keep an open mind:** See conflict as an opportunity to improve your project, argument, ideas, or teamwork skills.
- **Pause and breathe:** If you notice tensions rising in your team, take a break and breathe.

## Connect with a Centre for Professional Skills Teamwork Mentor

Teamwork mentors are recent alumni and upper-year students trained in facilitating teamwork—they work independently of course instructors to provide a space for you and your team to discuss communication strategies and troubleshoot conflict. To book a meeting, go to [uoft.me/writingcentres](https://uoft.me/writingcentres) and select "Rotman Commerce Centre for Professional Skills".

Barkley, E. F., Cross, K. P., & Major, C. H. (2014). *Collaborative Learning Techniques*. Jossey-Bass.