Team Meetings

Your team will hold frequent meetings during your project. Each team is different and each will operate in different ways, but these guidelines may help your team's effectiveness. Use these guidelines, but remember that a formal (or semi-formal) mode of operation does not mean that you must be completely serious at all times — it just means that you want to remain focused on the task at hand. These guidelines are just as useful for small teams (e.g., two people) as for larger ones.

Have a goal

✳ Have at least one goal in mind for every meeting.

✳ Make the goal(s) known in advance to all team members.

✳ Try to express the goal in terms of performing some specific activity to achieve some specific result. For example, the goal *develop an object diagram for the system* is preferable to the goal *gain an understanding of object relationships*; the former is a verifiable outcome, whereas the latter is not.

✳ If a goal is not being met, remind other team members of the goal. If it still isn't being met, then move on to another goal. If there's time, come back to it.

✳ If a goal has been met, establish "action items" that members will perform before the next meeting. For each goal, make it clear what the action items are, who is expected to accomplish each one, and when they are expected to accomplish it.

Keep to a schedule

Team activities tend to be informal and sometimes may wander, so some structure is essential.

✳ Have a definite starting time, place, and duration for the meeting, and **start on time**. If members are expected to be arriving late, the best solution is to reschedule the meeting so that everyone can make it. It is frustrating and time-wasting to repeat what has gone on for the absent members. If someone must be late, try to arrange the agenda so that the meeting begins with material that person can miss without interfering with their team responsibilities.

✳ Have a definite time for ending the meeting, and **stick to it**. Members need to be able to plan around other activities and long meetings are rarely productive anyway.

✳ Do not cancel or re-schedule meetings unless you have a well-understood procedure for notifying everyone well in advance.

Have an agenda

✳ Agree upon a procedure for creating an agenda for the meeting; i.e., a list of topics to be discussed, and who is responsible for leading each discussion. In general, any team member should be entitled to place an item on the agenda, and lead the discussion about it.

✳ If there is only one topic, then break the topic down into two or more sub-topics (identifying who's responsible for each topic.)

✳ Arrange in advance a rough idea of the time to be spent on each topic, and stick to it, even if the item is not resolved. This prevents meetings from getting "bogged down" on sticky issues and forces you to move on. (Unresolved issues should be put on the next meeting's agenda, or they should be the subject of a special meeting.)

✳ Not all team business requires the presence of all team members. If any member is not involved with business on particular agenda items, then the team should agree as a whole what those items are and who should be involved in discussing those items. This is another good reason to focus only on the announced agenda items — if additional items are brought up, they might require the participation of team members who should be there.

Keep records

✳ For every meeting, keep a log of the time, place, attendees, and planned agenda.

✳ Have an assigned note taker at each meeting (rotate this duty) who will write down, for each agenda item, points of agreement, disagreement, action items, and unresolved items. It is best for issues to be described without referring to individuals.

✳ Distribute the notes to everyone, even (especially?) if they did not attend. Accept corrections or additions to the notes if they are generally agreed upon.

Delegate duties

The advantage of working in a team is that each team member can do work that can be used by all of the team. The disadvantages are (a) the team must decide what each team member will do and (b) communicating the results of your work to others. Adopt practices that will maximize the advantages while minimizing the disadvantages, such as:

✳ Write down a brief description of what each team member is supposed to do and have a deadline.

✳ When reviewing others' work, stick to important issues. Do not waste time debating specific wording or style unless you are certain it will affect the overall quality of the final work.

✳ Accept that others' work will not be exactly what you would have done — each person will have their own style. (Remember that they probably feel the same way about your work.)

Behave professionally

✳ Respect others' ideas and make sure they have an adequate chance to express them. If members are more comfortable with written comments, then accommodate them.

✳ Do not decide on your own to take on someone else's tasks. Consider how you would feel if they took over your work without telling you.

✳ Because a class project is different from a work environment, there may be no clear "leader" established. If there are strong personalities, **concentrate on the task at hand and focus on the goal**. If there are disagreements about the task, write down the specific areas of disagreement, being as precise as you can. In some cases, the instructor may be able to help clarify the issue, particularly if you can clearly describe your problem.

✳ Learn about your teammates. Help them use their strengths and help them learn to overcome their weaknesses.

✳ Learn about yourself. Use your own strengths for everyone's benefit and allow others to help you learn to overcome your own weaknesses.