



Group Projects: Working with Friends

Having a friend as a teammate can be a huge relief when it comes to group projects. You can start the project already having an ally. Unfortunately, having a friend involved does not magically remove the stress that comes from potentially mismatched goals, different working styles and other concerns. When working with new people, it can feel possible to push through differences in style and create an end product as quickly as possible. With a friend involved, you've got a big motivation to preserve the relationship as well as get the job done.

What Can Go Wrong:

- **Alienating other group members:** Too many inside jokes and side conversations about weekend plans and others might feel a distance between themselves and you. Groups work best when everyone is in it together, and the perceived gap could limit cohesion and trust.
- **Jekyll / Hyde:** Your friend who you value for being laid-back is now a controlling micro-manager when it comes to getting work done. Or maybe they've always been reliable and now they're missing meetings leaving you to explain to the others where they are.
- **Avoid addressing issues:** This professor grades well for longer papers, but your friend insists on using short bulleted sentences. You know you're right, but don't say anything because you don't want to cause drama between you.
- **Relationship spillover:** A conflict emerges in the group about an important decision regarding the direction of the project. This tension follows you and your friend into your hangout session the next weekend.

Feeling Unhappy with the Project?

Decide if it's task or relationship related. Be honest with yourself – are you concerned about the direction of the project or the strain on your friendship? If your inner voice is saying, “Why didn't they have my back?” or “I can't believe they talked to me that way,” you're probably upset with how your friendship is going. Alternatively, if you find yourself thinking, “We have to figure out the next steps to get this done on time,” – that's a task related problem.

If it's a task problem: Your best bet is to try and work it out in the group setting. Revisit expectations, make sure everyone is speaking up, clarify your concerns with the group. See “Group Projects” DIY on our website for more tips.

If it's friendship related: Find time to talk with your friend. Explain how you're feeling, and what events led you to feel that way. Don't blame your friend. Ask how they're feeling and be open to hearing how you might have impacted them. Once you've both shared your perspective, brainstorm some strategies on how you can best keep working with each other. Clearing the air may be all the two of you need to feel better. It's also possible you'll decide after you finish this project you'll part ways as group mates!

What to expect from the SCRC: The SCRC offers conflict coaching and mediation services that could both be helpful in this context. Our conflict coaching is 1-on-1 training that can help you determine how to effectively move forward towards a fruitful, healthy working relationship. Mediation is an opportunity for you and your friend to talk to one another in private with a neutral party. Call us or drop by to talk about what you need.