

Team Building

Teamwork is an important element of this course. While you will certainly be in situations throughout your careers where you work independently, it is equally certain that you will often be part of a team. Surveys from employers consistently rank team skills as one of the critical abilities that they look for when recruiting. Consequently, team building is one element of this course, and your ability to function well on a team is explicitly part of your course grade. In addition, how well your group works together will influence the quality and hence the grades of your reports - not to mention how much fun vs. frustration you have in the process. The bottom line is that getting your team to perform well will not only improve your course grade, but it should also make the course more fun and educational for you.

Being a good team member takes practice and effort. It is real skill, just like the ability to write a clear report or give a good oral presentation. One of the ways that you can become a more effective team member is to be conscious of your behavior in a team and to become knowledgeable about different aspects of team dynamics. Teams generally go through well known phases. Conflicts, frustrations and bruised egos are almost inevitable in teamwork. On the other hand, if you become familiar with typical team dynamics, make a conscious effort to practice behaviors that characterize good team work, and take time to reflect on your team dynamics with an eye towards constantly improving your teamwork, you will have gone a long way towards gaining a very valuable skill.

Today's exercises are meant to start you on this process.

1. First, meet with your team and get acquainted. Ask yourselves questions such as "What is your favorite sport?" "What is your favorite style of music?" Decide on a team Name. If you are having trouble arriving at a team name, consider a name based on your commonalities.
2. Second, you should have read the short article, "So, You're Going to be a Member of a Team". This is your introduction to typical team dynamics and a set of behaviors that experts consider to be important for effective team work. Assuming all of your team members have read the article, take a few minutes to discuss it with your team mates, and come up with at least one question or comment that you group would like to share with the class.

Team Expectations and Responsibilities

The purpose of this exercise is to establish expectations of the individuals that make up your team. These expectations will act as the team's supporting structure and will remain in affect until the team is disassembled. The **notetaker** or recorder should write down all the ideas and opinions that the team comes up with, and it is vital that every member actively participates.

1. Find out which team member's birthday is coming up soonest. That person is the **notetaker**, who must keep track of the items generated during the brainstorming session. The person on the notetaker's right is the **facilitator**, who is responsible for making this process run smoothly, keeping people on task and making sure that everyone participates. The person on the facilitator's right is the **timekeeper**, who is responsible for timing the activities and gentle reminding the team of how much time is left.
2. Take 5 minutes to read and discuss the formal roles of meeting leader (close to our facilitator), notetaker and timekeeper on pages 79-84 of *The Team Memory Jogger* to familiar yourselves with their roles. As the semester progresses, the roles should be rotated among the individuals of the team.
3. Brainstorm a list of responsibilities that individuals have as members of the team. This should take at least 5 minutes. For example, a responsibility of an individual in the team might be to show up on time for all meetings and to be prepared for the meeting by doing any required work before hand. These lists will be used to evaluate your teamwork over the course of the semester, so take them seriously.
4. Now brainstorm a list of responsibilities that the team has to each of its individual members. Responsibilities of the team towards an individual might include being flexible about setting meeting times to accommodate individual schedules as much as possible, or listening to all opinions. Allow five minutes for this.
5. Come to a consensus on a ranking for each list. Which items are most important? The notetaker should record this. This exercise should take approximately five minutes to complete.
6. Brainstorm possible procedures for handling unacceptable team behavior. For example, what happens if a team member doesn't show up to a meeting and doesn't tell anyone? Can a team member be fired?

Reflections on Team Behavior

1. Reflect on how your team interacted during the previous exercises and compare your behaviors to the characteristics of good team performance on page 144 of the “So, You’re Going to be a Member of a Team” handout. This is a low stress activity and because of its short duration there is not time to assess each aspect of good teamwork. Still, think about items 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9 and 10 and reflect on how both you and your teammates did with respect to these issues. If you think there is room for improvement, make a conscious effort to improve your team work skills with the next group effort. Have the notetaker record impressions.
2. **Team Hands in:** Using ideas from page 144 of “So, You’re Going to be a Member of a Team” handout and pages 6-27 of *The Team Memory Jogger*, refine your two lists of responsibilities and procedures for handling unacceptable team behavior from the previous exercise. Come to a consensus on the lists and procedures, write up a clean final version (easy-to-read handwritten version or, even better, typed) and have all the team members sign it. This becomes a working “contract” for behavior on the team. The team hands in the signed copy to the instructor before next class period and places a second signed copy in the front of the Team Notebook.
3. **Each Individual Hands in:** Write up your assessment of how your team functioned and how you functioned on the team (not necessarily the same thing). This will be handed in to the instructor and is confidential. Also include your response to this set of team building exercises. Were these activities worthwhile, and if not, what kinds of activities would help you become a more effective team member? Do you even believe that teamwork should be part of a computer science course? Finally, an emphasis on teamwork can be new, threatening and stressful. Do you have any concerns about working in a team that you would like to share with the instructor? If so, include them so I can get a sense of where the class stands and so I can have the opportunity to try to alleviate some of your concerns. Please use good, easy-to-read handwriting or type it. Hand in to instructor before next class period. After reading the individual assessments, the instructor will provide appropriate feedback to the class (or Team) in a generic way to protect your confidentiality.