Tips for Making Your Team Work

1. **Meet regularly**.
   a. Set your first meeting as soon as possible after your team members are identified. Even a week of delay will cost you dearly later.
   b. Set a standard meeting time.
   c. Be reasonable – do not plan meetings for 9:00 PM when many people will be tired and unable to contribute fully.
   d. Be flexible – don't rule out a time because one person will not be able to make it to a meeting. If you are working as a team, you can easily inform that person of decisions made
   e. Be considerate. Only rule out meeting times when you really cannot meet, not times when you just do not want to meet or find it inconvenient to meet.
   f. Set a time limit for the meetings. Anything more than two hours is a waste of time. Three one-hour meetings are apt to be much more productive than one three-hour meeting.

2. **Plan meetings in advance**
   a. Prepare an agenda for each meeting. Rotate the responsibility for preparing the agenda among the team members.
   b. Be specific – not "discuss X," but rather "finalize list of items." Focus on making decisions and assigning action items.
   c. Set limits to the discussion time for every topic and stick to it; e.g., "Review potential items for index – 30 minutes."

3. **Conduct the meetings professionally**
   a. Take notes of the meeting. Rotate this assignment among members. Focus on decisions made and action items, not "what was discussed" or generalities.
   b. The meeting is NOT complete until everyone has a copy of the notes. Get these out immediately or very shortly after the meeting.
   c. Do not be verbose. Bullets are fine. Notes that exceed one page in length are not apt to be useful.

4. **Prepare for the meeting to maximize productivity**
   a. Come to meetings prepared to contribute *as a team member*, not do work you should have completed individually prior to the meeting. For example, if an agenda item is "review the potential items for the index submitted by each member," make sure you review your colleagues' items ahead of time and come to the meeting with your suggestions for changes.
   b. Set a specific time for submitting all work assigned to team members – 10 AM on Tuesday, not "on Tuesday" or "over the weekend."
   c. Make this time enough in advance of any meeting to provide meaningful time for members to review the work – not 3 PM when you plan to have the team meeting at 4 PM.

5. **Focus on tasks, not discussion**
   a. Start with a list of "general tasks or steps" you must accomplish to complete the assignment prior to the first team meeting. Assign one team member to provide this initial list of discrete tasks prior to the first team meeting.
   b. Then break the work down into sets of discrete actions. Move Past "what we have to do in general," to "8 action items."
   c. A greater number of discrete tasks that are more specific is better than fewer, less specific tasks.

d. For each task, make a list of everything you need to do. For example, you need to conduct a test focus group for your project. This involves several discrete tasks: finding a place to conduct the test, recruiting the participants, sending the first notice to the participants about the test place and time, sending a follow-up reminder the day before the test, making copies of any materials you will distribute to the participants, etc. Assign someone to every one of these items.

6. **Set time limits and standards for each task**
   a. Put a limit on the amount of time or effort you will spend on each task. For example, if you are conducting a literature review, limit the task. "Each team member will provide an annotation of three relevant research reports, no longer than two single-spaced pages each."
   b. Set agreed upon standards of performance for each task. For example, if you are conducting a literature search, you do not advance the team's effort much by sending everyone on the team 10 articles that you thought "looked useful." As a team, create a template for a summary of the key points of interest in each article. Send the summaries, not the article, to your teammates.
   c. Review each other's work. One of the biggest problem I see is that team members obviously never even reviewed what each member wrote in the final submission. For example, if each of you will submit a set of potential items for the index by 2 PM on Tuesday, make a rule for when you will provide comments on the items – like 10 AM the next day.

7. **Make a timeline and stick to it**
   a. Work "backwards" from the due date for the assignment. Don't start by figuring out "when you can do things." Start by figuring out when each of those major steps in the assignment must be complete in order for you to meet the deadline and work from that.
   b. Stick to the timeline. The more you postpone and move deadlines, the farther behind you fall.

8. **Prevent and solve problems**
   a. Put "team functioning" as an item on the agenda regularly. Ignoring problems on the team does not solve them. It makes them get worse. Spending 10 minutes at each meeting can save you hours of time later.
   b. Be courteous with your colleagues when you identify and raise a problem, but be firm and open.
   c. Use self and team assessment instruments like those in the documents available at the course website to analyze your own role on the team and overall team functioning.
   d. Do not let problems go unresolved. Unpleasant as it may be to try to resolve problems as a team, the cost in time and collegial relationships is far greater if you leave things unresolved.