



Group work, supervision and research ethics.

Three things decided long before a mark is given: how a group organises itself, how you use a supervisor's time, and how you treat the people and data in your project. This document sets out how each works, and where your own institution's rules take over.

1 Who does what — a role allocation

A group fails most often because no one owns anything. Give each role a named person, and write down what it owes the others. Roles may rotate; they should not be abandoned.

Role	What the role owes the group
Coordinator	Owens the plan and the deadlines, chairs the meetings, and makes the call when the group is stuck.
Record-keeper	Keeps the notes and the decisions, so that what was agreed can be checked later.
Researcher	Finds and judges the sources, and records where each claim came from.
Editor	Holds the single voice: assembles the final document and enforces one referencing style.
Presenter	Speaks for the group, owns the delivery, and handles the questions.
Quality checker	Reads the final version against the brief as an examiner would, and flags what fails it.

2 Six ways groups fail

- **No shared brief.** Each member answers a slightly different question.
- **Unclear roles.** Everyone assumes someone else is doing it.
- **No schedule.** Work begins the week it is due.
- **The loudest voice writes it.** The document becomes one person's work.
- **Decisions not recorded.** The same argument is had twice.
- **The silent member.** One contribution never arrives until the end.

3 A project charter, on one page

GROUP PROJECT CHARTER — SPECIMEN

Title: the working title of the deliverable, in one line.

Members and roles: each name against a role from the table above.

Deliverable: exactly what is handed in — format, length, and the single question it answers.

Milestones: dated checkpoints — research complete, first draft, review, final submission.

Decision rule: how the group decides when members disagree — for example, a majority, with the coordinator breaking a tie.

Escalation: what happens when a member misses a deadline, and at what point the matter goes to the tutor rather than staying in the group.

PRACTICE Signing a charter is general university practice, not an institutional rule. It is the quickest way to make the group's expectations visible before they are tested.

4 Free-riding, and how groups handle it early

Free-riding is a design fault more than laziness: if a member's contribution cannot be seen, no one has a reason to make one. Make it visible from the first week — a named task with a date for every member, and a record of who agreed to what. Raise a missed deadline with the person first, in private and early: a problem named in week two is a schedule change; the same problem in week twelve is a complaint after the fact.

HOW PEER ASSESSMENT USUALLY WORKS

Where a module uses it, each member privately rates the others' contribution, and the tutor adjusts the group mark. It rewards those who did the work and records those who did not. Treat the record-keeper's notes as evidence, not as late point-scoring.

5 Make the work visible

Agree in week one who wrote each section, who checked it and who presented it. That record is the evidence if contributions are marked separately, and the fairest way to divide the work if they are not.



5 Preparing for a supervision meeting

A supervisor's time is short and shared. Arrive with an agenda you have already filled in, so the meeting is about decisions rather than a status report.

AGENDA TEMPLATE — FILL IN THE FIVE LINES

1. **Progress.** What I did since we last met.
2. **The problem.** What I am stuck on — stated as one exact question.
3. **What I need.** The decision, reading or sign-off I want today.
4. **Next actions.** What I will do before we next meet.
5. **Next meeting.** The date and time we agree before we part.

WHAT SUPERVISION IS NOT

- **Not proofreading.** A supervisor reads for argument and direction, not to correct your commas.
- **Not ghost-writing.** They will not write sections, supply the analysis, or fill gaps you have left.
- **Not a deadline rescue.** Material sent the night before cannot be read in time to help.

6 A meeting log

Keep a running log. It reminds you what was agreed, and it is the record if a question arises about progress.

Date	What was discussed	Action agreed	By
04 Mar	Draft research question; two candidate sources rejected.	Rewrite the question; find two better sources.	Student
18 Mar	Method outline; sample too small.	Widen the sample; resend the method section.	Student
01 Apr	Draft introduction read; structure agreed.	Rewrite the opening; send full draft by 15 Apr.	Student

PRACTICE A log of three lines a meeting is enough. It is also the fastest way to see whether the work is actually moving.

7 Email etiquette, and one worked example

- **Use your university address** and a subject line that names the module and the topic.
- **Write to one named person**, not to a group, and use their correct title.
- **Be specific.** One question per email is better than five.
- **Say what you have already tried** before asking for help.
- **Do not send at midnight.** Expect a reply in working hours, not instantly.
- **Attach the right file**, named clearly, and check it opens.

WORKED EXAMPLE — ASKING FOR FEEDBACK

Subject: BI0210 project – draft method, feedback please

Dear Dr Mwamba,

I have attached the draft method section for my BI0210 project. I have rewritten the sampling plan since we last met, and widened the sample as you suggested.

Could you tell me whether the sampling plan is now sound enough to begin data collection? If it is not, I would be glad to know which part to fix first.

I can send the results section by 15 April.

Thank you,
C. Phiri (student number 20/1234)

8 Using the feedback before you meet again

A supervisor's comments are directions, not a verdict. Read them twice: once while you are annoyed, and once the next day. Sort them into three piles — fix now, clarify, and disagree with evidence. Answer each one before the next meeting, and argue a point only with a reason, never with "I think it is fine".

9 When a supervisor is hard to reach

Busy supervisors are normal near deadlines. Agree the next meeting date before you leave, put every decision in writing, and send one polite reminder if a question sits unanswered for a week. If the work is genuinely blocked, say so early: that is a scheduling problem, not a complaint.



8 Informed consent

Informed consent means a person agrees to take part knowing what the project is, what it will ask of them, what you will do with the information, and that they may stop at any time without giving a reason. Consent is not assumed from silence, nor signed away by a tick on a form the person did not read.

Give the information plainly, in a form the participant keeps, and let them ask questions first.

SPECIMEN CONSENT STATEMENT

"I have read the information about this study. I understand what I am being asked to do, and that my answers will be used only for this project. I understand that taking part is voluntary, that I may stop at any time, and that I need not give a reason. I agree to take part."

Name: Date: Signature:

9 Anonymity, confidentiality and safe storage

ANONYMITY

No one, including you, can link a response to a person. Best for questionnaires and sensitive topics, but it limits follow-up questions.

CONFIDENTIALITY

You can identify the person, but you do not reveal it. Names are replaced by codes and kept separately from the data.

SAFE STORAGE

Keep data on a password-protected device, not a shared drive or a personal phone gallery. Dispose of identifiers when the project ends, as your institution requires.

10 Ethics clearance

A student project that involves human participants — interviews, questionnaires, observations of people, or their data — normally requires ethics clearance before any data is collected. The exact procedure is set by your own institution and school; ask your supervisor which committee and which form apply to you, and do this at the planning stage, not after the first interview.

"Issues of misconduct in Research should be brought to the attention of the Research Ethics Committee"

University of Zambia, *Research Policy and Intellectual Property Rights*, §4

SOURCE University of Zambia, *Research Policy and Intellectual Property Rights*, Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies. Section 4 is "Misconduct in Research".

11 The participant information sheet

Consent is only informed if the person had the information. Whatever form your institution uses, a participant should find, in plain language:

- Who you are, and which institution the project belongs to.
- The purpose of the study, in one or two sentences.
- What taking part involves, and how long it takes.
- What will happen to the information, and who will see it.
- That participation is voluntary, and that they may withdraw.
- How to contact you, and how to raise a concern.

12 Data protection in practice

COLLECT ONLY WHAT YOU NEED

Every extra field is another thing to protect. If it is not needed, do not collect it.

SEPARATE IDENTIFIERS

Keep the list linking codes to names in a different file from the data.

KEEP IT AS LONG AS YOU MUST

Set a date to delete identifiers, as your institution requires.

13 Vulnerable participants and extra care

Some groups need more care: children and young people, patients, and anyone whose position makes it hard to refuse — students you teach, or people answering for an organisation. Expect a heavier consent process and a need for clearance before you begin. Ask your supervisor and the committee, and ask early.

14 Ethics checklist

- Clearance obtained before the first contact with a participant.
- Participants told the purpose in plain language.
- Consent recorded and kept, away from the data.
- Voluntary participation stated, with the right to withdraw.
- Identifiers removed or coded before analysis.
- Data stored securely, and disposed of at the end.
- Findings reported honestly, without trimming what does not fit.
- Any concern about misconduct raised with the committee — not ignored.