# WRITING ASSIGNMENTS IN GROUPS

In many cases, group-based essays will be longer than those required from individuals, but this is not always the case, and in any event it is much typically more challenging to write the same content in fewer words. The challenge here is usually to work out how to do the work.

In most student groups, the process will ***typically*** work in the way shown in the figure.

**Fig 7.xxx: Typical Stages in the Writing of a Group Assignment.**

1. Get the assignment from the tutor

2. Split the assignment up according to the number of groups members

3. Meet to discuss (repeated as needed)

4. Compile finished piece of work

5. Edit to ensure consistency of style and check for references/citations

6. Submit as a group

In reality, the process of researching, writing, compiling, editing and checking the final assignment is not easy and takes a great deal of time – the word ‘typical’ is used very carefully here. Describing something as *typical* does not mean that this is the way that things *should* be done (in the same way that ‘common sense’ is not all that common).

There are a number of potential issues here when we think about completing the work – we will ignore those already mentioned in Chapter 7.

### Q1: Should we split up tasks?

It is possible to split up tasks, but there are some warnings here.

Firstly, everyone HAS to take equal ownership and responsibility for the finished product. A piece of work containing errors, plagiarism or weak argument could lead to issues in the group as members start to blame others for doing poor work. Overcoming or avoiding this takes maturity and tact: poor performance in any situation does need addressing, but requires good communication skills in order to ensure that poor performers improve rather than ‘opt out’.

Secondly, delegation can only be done according to the skills, motivation and resources available to the person to whom work is delegated. Delegating to folk who do not have the appropriate understanding or knowledge or skills is not going to help the group.

Thirdly, it is very rare that this is the way things are done in professional life. It is far more usual for a group to come together and discuss the various questions or issues that make up the task, make notes on the discussion and then present a final report. Individuals writing ‘their own parts’ and then trying to compile these is inefficient, since doing so will usually require a lot of editing.

### Q2: How much background research is ‘sufficient’?

There really is no simple answer to this question – or rather the simple answer is ‘Enough to be persuasive’, but this is often unhelpful in a situation where you are not the one marking the work and therefore have no understanding of what ‘enough’ means. If you look at journal articles, you will find that nearly every sentence within the literature review will probably have 2 or 3 different citations given: the good news is that you probably do not need to provide as much as that within a group assignment – but you should have a common understanding within the group as to what is expected.

### Q3: How do we ensure that everyone does the citations and writes in the same style?

This question really goes back to the issue of whether you split up the writing in the way described. If you keep notes of discussions and use those notes as the basics for writing the assignment or report, then this issue does not arise.

However, if you have decided to split up the work, then there are two ways to address this issue: either be very clear and agree on style and referencing/citation format at the beginning of your work, or you will need to assign someone as proof reader and ask them to go back and read through everything that everyone has written and edit it. The latter approach will take time and relies on everyone in the groups getting their work to that individual at a very definite point in time (which will happen in a good group, but may not happen in a group where there are different levels of motivation).