Team Communication
The Fundamentals of Managing Team Projects

Emily Lane Ferris
Engineering Specialist, Global Communication Center

A task schedule is a list of who should do what by when. The schedule is developed at the beginning of the project and continually updated as the team encounters new challenges or changing criteria.

A task schedule helps teams by:
- holding team members accountable
- forcing the team to confront different understandings of the project early on
- helping the team anticipate potential problems
- ensuring that team members review each other's work
- allowing team members to develop new skills with knowledge other members will "have their back"

Task schedules should build review points into the schedule. A review point is simply time dedicated for team members to provide feedback on one another's work (as well as a timeline for implementing those changes). Review points greatly increase the quality of the project because team members can catch errors and suggest improvements.

SAMPLE TASK SCHEDULE

Deadline	Who	Task	Status
9/04	Amy	Write topic proposal and bring to group meeting.	Completed
9/04	Everyone	Review and discuss topic proposal at in-class meeting.	Completed
9/06	Amy	Turn in revised topic proposal to instructor.	Completed
9/09	Jessica	Bring template with sample layout for manual to meeting	
9/09	Everyone	Discuss and revise template at in-class meeting.	
9/12	Bryan	Write instructions for installing motor and arms. Email.	
9/12	Jessica	Write instructions for assembling base. Email.	
9/12	Amy	Line up two users for 9/14. Prepare all materials for usability tests. Email group with status.	
9/14	Everyone	Test-drive instructions with users at 3:00 in the library.	
9/14	Amy	Email a list of changes to group.	
9/17	Bryan& Jessica	Revise instructions. Email Amy.	
9/19	Amy	Edit manual. Prepare overview and table of contents. Compile and email completed manual to group.	
9/21	Everyone	Group meeting at 3:00 to review final draft & turn in.	

CHECKLIST FOR REVISING A DOCUMENT

1. Reread project requirements and goals
2. Begin with praise
3. Suggest (or add) additional material
4. Note (or revise) inaccurate or misleading material
5. Suggest (or implement) changes to argument or organization.
    - Does the document answer the readers' questions?
    - Is the bottom line emphasized so the reader will find it?
    - Do figures make a clear argument?
    - Is all of the information where the readers expect it?
6. Address lower-order details, such as issues of grammar and style.

IF YOU NEED TO TROUBLESHOOT….

1. Take a deep breath and eliminate the temptation to make an emotional or personal attack
2. Begin with a compliment
3. State the problem succinctly, tying the problem to shared goals or criteria
4. Suggest a procedural strategy or change that will move the team forward
5. Obtain commitment to your procedural change or an alternative

Potential procedural changes that can move the team forward

- Add layers to the task schedule
    - New tasks
    - More check-in points
    - Earlier deadlines
    - More detailed revision procedures or guidelines
- Reassign roles to better match team members' motivations and goals
- Implement formal brainstorming procedures
- Develop a thorough pro/con list
- Seek outside input (from supervisor, expert, client, etc.)

**For help with a teamwork problem,
email success@andrew.cmu.edu or visit
https://www.cmu.edu/student-success/programs/communication-support/index.html
to schedule an appointment.**

Sample Team Charter

Broad Team Goals:
1. Clearly communicate the "bottom line" meaning of our results throughout the report.
2. Impress the instructor with the amount of effort we have put into collecting and analyzing our data.

Measurable Team Goals:
1. Meet all 6 of the evaluation criteria listed on the assignment sheet.
2. Meet or beat all deadlines.
3. Obtain data from at least 15 users.
4. Follow all 8 guidelines for tables and figures listed in instructors' PowerPoint presentation.

Personal goals:
1. Aaron – improve management and teamwork skills
2. Bryan – improve writing skills (be less wordy)
3. Yolan – improve writing skills (improve organization and grammar)
4. Mandy—improve technology skills (especially PowerPoint) and teamwork skills

Individual Commitment:
- Aaron, Yolan and Mandy are all willing to put in 100% effort.
- Bryan would like to put in 100% effort but is unsure if his job will allow him to commit that   much time. He is willing to accept a slightly lower grade if it turns out he cannot keep up.

Other concerns:
- Yolan is worried that her grammar skills may need a lot of work.
- Mandy has only done one PowerPoint presentation before but really wants to improve her tech skills and will work hard to learn.
- Aaron is usually unable to check his email on evenings and weekends but will try to check at least twice every school day.
- Bryan is just worried about his job interfering.

Conflict Resolution:
If we experience conflict that is not resolved after 30 minutes of respectful discussion of the points, we will present both sides to the instructor and ask him to decide.

Missed Deadlines: If a team member misses a deadline, the project manager will send a "gentle reminder" email. If that team member does not respond within 24 hours, the project manager will contact the instructor, describing the problem. If there is some extenuating circumstance (ex: personal emergency), the project manager will contact the rest of the team for input on how to proceed.

Unacceptable Work:
If a team member turns in work that is clearly unacceptable (ex: leaves out important information; has major errors; does not meet the assignment criteria; clearly does not meet the team goals of emphasizing the bottom line throughout), other team members should report their concerns to the project manager. The project manager will then contact that team member with a list of concerns and suggest a deadline (usually 48 hours) for when a revised copy of the work is due. If that team member is confused about why the work is unacceptable, they should contact another team member, the instructor, or the writing center for assistance and email the project manager explaining their progress on seeking assistance for the problem. We want to note that there is no shame in seeking outside assistance!

SAMPLE MEETING MINUTES

Which Version is most appropriate for a project team?

Version 1

From: Jason
To: Team
Re: Team meeting – Monday, 3/3/03

Present: Susan, Jeff, Karen, Jason

Karen started us off by showing us a website about oil tanker transportation. We looked at that for five minutes and then Jason suggested we review the draft Jeff prepared. Jason noted some incomplete sentences. Susan also noticed some minor grammatical errors. Karen suggested moving the information on oil transportation closer to the beginning. Jason agreed. Susan and Jeff also thought this was a good idea, but felt jumping right in to the details on transportation would be too abrupt. The others agreed that the current introduction should remain, but Karen thought that it should be minimized since our audience would already know this information. Jeff liked the current introduction because it has emotional appeal and would catch our audience's attention. Jason and Susan weren't sure which version would be best. Karen suggested that we prepare two different versions and ask the instructor which one would be best of our audience. Jason volunteered to set up a meeting with the instructor later in the week, but Jeff and Karen didn't have copies of their schedules with them. Everyone on the team will email Jason tonight with a copy of their schedule. Karen volunteered to write up a revised draft and email it out to the team by Wed. night. Everybody will read this draft and show up on Thursday with comments.

Jeff suggested that the team begin working on the next section of the proposal. Susan, Karen and Jason thought that we needed to include information on costs. Jeff thought that we should look at SPCC regulations next, but agreed that costs were also a high priority. Susan's uncle works for Texaco and can provide us with some information on costs. Jason volunteered to draft a section on costs by next Tuesday. Jeff and Susan both have a calculus test on Wed. and can't work much on the project until then. We set up our next team meeting for Thursday at 1:00.

SAMPLE MEETING MINUTES (CONTINUED)

Version 2

From: Jason
To: Team
Re: Team meeting – Monday, 3/3/03

Present: Susan, Jeff, Karen, Jason

To Do:
- Everyone: Email Jason tonight with your schedule for Friday and Monday
- Karen: implement the changes the team made on the research review. Email revised draft to team by Wed.
- Jason: set up meeting with instructor for Friday or Monday.
- Susan: draft a section on costs by next Tuesday.
- Everyone: Read the draft Karen emails us and show up on Thurs with comments.

Dates: Next team meeting on Thurs. 3/7 at 1:00.

Decisions:
1. Revisions to research review:
We spent most of the meeting discussing Jeff's draft. We decided to
(1) move the information on oil transportation closer to the beginning
(2) prepare two different versions of the introductory section—one with the current emotional introduction on the environmental impacts of oil spills and one with the more minimized introduction that doesn't repeat info our audience already knows. We will ask the instructor to decide which works better for our audience.
(3) make grammatical corrections, esp. fixing incomplete sentences.

Karen will make the changes the team suggested and email out a revised version by Wed. night. We should all read it and come in on Thursday with comments.

2. Meeting with the instructor
Jason will arrange a meeting w/ instructor to discuss the two drafts. We all need to email him tonight with times we are available.

3. Costs:
We decided that the next step is to estimate the costs of modifying the oil tankers. Susan will research this information and draft a section on costs by next Tuesday.

4. EPA website
Karen found some good information about oil transportation on the EPA website. The url is:
http://www.epa.gov/oilspill/

Next meeting (3/7): Discuss Karen's revisions to research review; Verify meting time with instructor; Discuss costs section if time.

SAMPLE MEETING MINUTES (CONTINUED)

Version 3

From: Jason
To: Team
Re: Team meeting – Monday, 3/3/03

Present: Susan, Jeff, Karen, Jason

The meeting was called to order by Karen at 1:05.

1. Karen showed us a website with good information. The url is http://www.epa.gov/oilspill/

2. The group discussed Jeff's draft. Jason and Susan noted some grammatical errors. Karen thought the information on the environmental impact of oil spills should be minimized. Jeff objected, stating that the current introduction provided emotional appeal and would grab the reader's attention.

3. Karen moved that we prepare two versions of the introduction section and volunteered to complete this task by Wed. night. The motion was agreed to by the rest of the group.

4. Jason moved that the group set up a meeting with the instructor and volunteered for this task. This motion was agreed to by the rest of the group. Everyone needs to email Jason with their schedule tonight.

5. Jeff moved that we work on the costs section next. Susan informed the group that her uncle works for Texaco. Susan moved that she will find out information from costs from him and draft a costs section by next Tuesday. This motion carried unanimously.

6. Our next team meeting is on Thursday at 1:00

The meeting adjourned at 1:50

PROJECT MANAGER DUTIES

- Maintain and update task schedule
- Create and disseminate meeting minutes & agenda
- Email reminders about upcoming and missed deadlines
- Contact professor (or other source) if team experiences major problem

SUMMARY

Task schedule	- Structures the project - Holds people accountable - Builds review and revision into the project
Meeting minutes	- Enforce group decisions - Hold people accountable
Team charter	- Clarifies criteria for success - Anticipates and prevents procedural problems
Project manager	Enforces group decisions