

COLLABORATIVE WRITING STRATEGIES

Although it may be frustrating, certain techniques can make the dreaded group project assignments easier. Good communication is the key to a successful project. All group members should make sure that they have a clear grasp of what the assignment entails and what is needed from each person.

There are three types of collaborative tasks that should be included in group projects:

- Higher order thinking – Group members must define, discuss, and debate to solve complex problems.
- Division of labor - Very large jobs that cannot be completed by an individual within a limited time frame must be divided.
- Specialist or expertise-based tasks - Each collaborator has a different area of expertise to contribute (Lunsford, 1991, p.6).

One way to assure that everyone plays a part in the project is to assign tasks to each person. Tasks should be rotated so that each person has an opportunity to provide feedback in every area. The tasks should be divided into essential positions:

- Drafter – This person sits at the computer or with the paper and pen and does the primary writing.
- Reviewer – This person will read what the other person has written to identify and examine paragraph focus, idea arrangement, and development. This is done best when the reviewer reads out loud to the group!
- Editor – This person will do grammar check, formatting, and review source integration.

Dividing the work up in such a way benefits the entire group without putting too much strain on any one person. To further alleviate stress, make sure to complete assignments in a timely manner.

Procrastination is common among students; however, it is not conducive to success in the best of circumstances. It can be especially detrimental for group projects. To make the most of your time, try to set goals for each meeting. It may help to have some sort of written agenda that sets your plan for the meeting. By the end of each session, you should have some aspect or step of your project completed and possibly even have independent tasks set for each member to complete before the next meeting.

Also, remember to have specific roles assigned for each group member. Assigning roles is much more effective than dividing up parts to write; roles allow the group to put forth a more collaborative effort. Be sure that each member understands what their role will require and when they should have it completed. Once again, time is an important factor in the success of any group project.

Technology is an often overlooked tool for collaborative writing, but it can be very useful. Meeting often is sometimes inconvenient. It may even cause problems for the group effort. If one group member is unable to meet, he or she may be left behind without being able to contribute to the project.

Here are some of the technologies that you may utilize:

- Chats and instant messaging – These are handy for discussion when all members cannot attend. They can be used to preserve the discussion transcript for later reflection or integration.
- E-mail drafts to each other - The comments feature in Microsoft Word allows you to insert your own responses to the ideas, arguments, and support provided in the text.
- Discussion boards – Each member can post or contribute when they are able.

- If you can't attend, call in, or e-mail your comments ahead of time.

It is important for the group to stay on task and consider every aspect of the project. Brainstorming is a key process for this. As you brainstorm and begin planning your paper, keep these strategies in mind:

- Have two or more note-takers keep track of what is said and compare notes after the fact. These notes can be used to draft, revise, and edit the paper.
- Write your thesis together and develop an organization or outline for the whole paper together.
- Write the document together. This ensures that it doesn't adopt one person's voice, or multiple voices. A good strategy for drafting the paper together is to select your best typist or two to be the primary drafters. Then, everyone else can sit around the drafter and "feed" the person sentences. Write the document together so that it doesn't adopt one person's voice or switch between multiple voices.
- Revise and edit together. These steps in the writing process determine what your final product will be. This makes it imperative for each group member to have an opportunity to make changes to the final draft.
- Read the paper out loud and discuss whether or not each idea, sentence, and paragraph connects to the ones around it.

If the paper has been cooperatively written, group members should trade sections and read them as if the topic is entirely new. Ask open-ended questions, especially "how?" "why?" and "what is the connection?" This will help you see how to tie sections together.

As a whole, the group should edit for content. Make sure that all relevant information is included and presented in a comprehensible manner. All irrelevant information should be deleted. Check the flow of the paper to make sure that it is not disjointed. Your audience should never be able to tell that different people contributed different parts of the paper.

Sources Consulted

Lunsford, Andrea. "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center." *The Writing Center Journal* 12, no. 1 (1991): 3-10.