



How to Solve Common Team Writing Problems

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Collaborative writing can often present a number of challenges. What happens if my partner is not willing to take on an appropriate share of the work? If my partner's writing is not at a level I am comfortable with, how do I communicate this problem tactfully? Or, conversely, what do I do if I feel threatened or intimidated by my partner's standards?

Although each situation has its own unique solution, there is one factor that is imperative in all successful collaborative writing: early communication. After you are given your assignment, meet with your partner as soon as possible. It is important that you are candid with your partner about your goals for the assignment. If you are a student who has very high standards in terms of the grade received, then your partner needs to know that. If you have a busy schedule and perhaps don't have adequate time to commit to the assignment, then your partner needs to know that as well. Ideally, both partners involved will share the work load equally. However, anyone who has worked collaboratively in the past knows that this is not always the case. If the situation you are in necessitates an imbalanced approach, then it is important that this dichotomy is understood early in the process. That way, both students can adapt the nature of their contributions to fit the common goal, and the likelihood of tension within your group is reduced.

In any collaborative effort, it is also important that each group member communicate his or her strengths and weaknesses. If you are a student that struggles with language and grammar, then you can volunteer to do the bulk of the research. Conversely, if you can write eloquently but struggle with technical concepts, then you can volunteer to do proofreading and editing. Your partner is more likely to put forth greater effort if he or she feels as though his strengths are used and respected – and the same will likely hold true with you.

As noted earlier, the basis of a successful collaborative writing project is early disclosure and discussion of all parties' expectations and abilities. The Hanson CTC can provide suggestions to group members who wish to improve their written communication skills. Each group member must keep in mind that underlying the group writing task is the even greater challenge of group dynamics. Not only should we use each collaborative writing assignment as an opportunity to learn from one another and hone our skills, but we should take the time to recognize that every time we are obligated to work with others – be it in our field or outside our field – we have an opportunity to discover strengths and weaknesses in ourselves.

As you approach a group project, it is wise to ask yourself some questions. Can you adjust your expectations based on the realities of your group and your combined abilities? Can you let go

of control of aspects of a project that are not delegated to you? Can you be reliable and take the project seriously? Most importantly, can you treat your colleagues with respect and focus on the task at hand in a responsible manner?

It's no secret that group projects have a bad reputation. On the other hand, group work provides opportunities to acquire skills that will be helpful later in life as one enters the workforce. Each member of the group, for example, can learn to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of his or her teammates and practice the invaluable skill of working together toward a common goal.