



Team Writing and Why the First Draft Is Crucial

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In the past, we have had both good and bad experiences when writing a paper in a group setting. In most cases, when you are assigned a group project, the other group members are willing to invest time into writing a great paper and the writing process will go smoothly. Unfortunately, sometimes you can be paired with a group member who has no interest in the project and just wants to get a passing grade in the class. When you find yourself in this situation, you could easily end up doing the bulk of the writing on your own. **THIS SHOULD NOT HAPPEN.** You will have to find a way to encourage your partner to participate in the writing process. The following tips and strategies should help you devise a plan to make this group project a success.

First and foremost, writing a first draft is a very important stage in the writing process. It provides the writer with a chance to meld their thoughts together and to further develop their ideas. Because it is a preliminary stage in the writing process, however, many students fail to grasp its importance. In fact, many students tend to put forth little to no effort when writing a first draft for an assignment; especially if they are awarded no points for their efforts. Frequently, students tend to just throw together their first draft, especially when they are feeling the weight of all of their other school work. Unfortunately, this only causes more stress and work later on, as it is easier to make adjustments to a solid paper than it is to totally re-write one.

In addition, a first draft (and any draft, for that matter) is a reflection on you and your team. If it is poorly written and sloppily constructed, the person grading it will form a negative image of you and your teammates. Don't let this be you! Remember, writing is a *process* and good writing always takes time. By taking your first draft seriously and putting forth as much effort as you would for the final draft, you will be much better off in the long run. The result will be a complete, professional paper that you, as engineers, can be proud of. So why not put some time into your paper during the early writing stages. Only good things can come from having this mindset!

Tips for Getting Started and Staying on Track

Meet with Your Group's Members Early and Often!

- ✓ Review the guidelines for the assignment; make sure all group members have a clear understanding of the assignment.

- ✓ Create an outline and generate ideas for each section; be sure to encourage and consider ALL ideas.
- ✓ Divide and Conquer! Give each group member one part of the draft to write.
- ✓ Develop a group deadline that is a few days before the actual deadline so that all group members will stay on track and there will be time for collaboration and revision.

Begin Writing

- ✓ Re-read the guidelines for your assignment and be sure to include all parts in your draft, even if you feel some parts may be underdeveloped.
- ✓ Identify your audience; as an engineer, a formal tone is vital and builds your credibility in the eyes of the reader.
- ✓ Introduce your paper with gusto! Be sure to capture the reader's attention in your first paragraph so they will *want* to continue reading.
- ✓ Continue to build on each previous paragraph with smooth transitions; walk your reader through your topic, don't just bombard him/her with information.

Bring Each Section Together

- ✓ As a group, work together to compile each section into a cohesive paper.
- ✓ Work with your teammates, not against them.
- ✓ Be sure to consider all ideas and include those with the most weight.
- ✓ Do not just copy and paste together each group members' sections.
- ✓ Choose one person to combine all the sections and establish a uniform voice.
- ✓ Take turns reading the paper aloud to see how well it flows together.

Make an Appointment with the Hanson CTC

- ✓ Even if your professor does not require you to make an appointment with the CTC center, you are wise to do so.
- ✓ Acquiring an outside opinion is always helpful as many unnoticed mistakes can be corrected.
- ✓ If you are having trouble unifying the voices of your group members, the CTC can help you identify and fix contradictory information, create smooth transitions between sections, and clarify vague terms or phrases.

Conclusion

Thomas Jefferson described himself as "*a great believer in luck...I find the harder I work the more I have of it.*" By catching mistakes early and investing extra time in writing a clear and cohesive first draft, you will find it easier—and less stressful—to correct and polish your final draft into an exceptionally written paper.