



Efficient Group Writing

Overview

While collaborative assignments allow you to draw upon the strengths of all group members, they can also be challenging. This handout provides steps and strategies for navigating group writing and tips for success. To help clarify the process, we've divided group assignments into three phases:

1. Planning
2. Research and Writing
3. Integrating

Phase 1: Planning

Group assignments require careful planning before you begin to write. The following steps will help you work efficiently as a group, setting you up for success:

- a) **Exchange contact information:** Create a contact list and establish how you will be communicating as a group (e.g. email threads, in-person meetings, google docs).
- b) **Review the assignment outline:** Ensure that all group members are clear on the purpose and requirements of the assignment.
- c) **Pick a topic:** As a group pick a general topic or theme you are all interested in exploring further. Once the topic is selected, you may need to conduct preliminary research before reconvening to determine the subsections of your report or create a thesis statement for your essay. Get this process started as soon as possible!
- d) **Determine your focus or working thesis and create a plan:** Working collaboratively, determine the specific focus and subsections of your assignment. If you are writing a report, the subsections might be dictated by the assignment outline. If you are writing an essay, you will need to draft a research question or working thesis to give you direction. You will need to meet regularly to discuss the further formulation and re-formulation of your working thesis.
- e) **Assign sections:** Working from the plan, determine as a group who is responsible for producing each section of the assignment. In order to produce a coherent piece of writing, it is essential that everyone understand how each section contributes to the assignment as a whole. Knowing what will be covered in other sections will prevent repetition and help each writer create transitions.

- f) **Assign responsibilities:** You will need to select a group member to integrate the sections of the assignment into a cohesive whole. Other responsibilities you will need to assign may include: compiling and reviewing the final bibliography, writing an introduction and conclusion, organizing and creating an agenda for meetings, recording and distributing meeting notes, and writing an executive summary or abstract (if required).

It is important to note that each member is responsible for contributing a well-researched polished, edited piece of writing to the integrating writer, free of grammar, punctuation, spelling and citation errors.

- g) **Establish a timeline:** Review the external deadlines for the project. Working backwards from the final due date(s) established by your professor, determine your internal deadlines. Set deadlines for each stage of the process to keep everyone on track. Start early and leave ample time for integrating all the sections into a single cohesive essay or report!
- h) **Commit:** Ensure that each group member commits to fulfilling his or her responsibilities on time. Creating a group contract is one way your can establish your expectations as a group from the start to avoid potential future conflicts.

Phase 2: Research and Writing

Now that you share a clear plan, each group member can begin his or her individual work. Unlike independent assignments, group writing requires collaboration throughout the research and writing process.

In addition to your regular researching and writing strategies, we recommend that you:

- a) **Maintain constant group communication:** Be in touch with your group members and read each other's rough work to keep the project progressing smoothly. If you know what your colleagues are working on, you will be more likely to produce a cohesive document. What began as a research question, or working thesis will now have to move towards an answer to the question, a claim to be made, or a definitive thesis statement – (whatever is appropriate for the particular assignment), and this will have to be discussed/debated as a group.
- b) **Ask questions:** When in doubt about anything related to the paper, consult with other members. Do this via email and copy all members on the communication so as to maintain and encourage transparency and open communication.

Phase 3: Integrating

During this final phase of the writing process, the integrating writer assembles the individual sections of the paper. He or she will make minor edits to remove repetition and will add transitions to improve the flow of the document. He or she will also check that citations are correct and may be responsible for writing an introduction and conclusion. Other group members will be involved in the integration process through:

- a) **Additional section edits:** If there are major edits required in any individual section, the integrating writer will send it back to group member responsible.
- b) **Final group edit:** Once the integrating writer has assembled the paper, he or she will send a draft for final review to the rest of the group to make sure that everyone is satisfied with the finished product. Include time for a final group-wide revision in your initial timeline. Online document sharing applications such as Google Docs can be useful tools for collaborative

How We Can Help

Come in to Writing Support with your group. We'd be happy to discuss the assignment; however, all of the group members have to be present.

Integrate Writing Support appointments as part of your timeline, we prefer to meet at the planning stages where it's helpful to have conversations about writing.

Remember to communicate with your professor if you experience any difficulties with your group members or ask your professor for advice on how to manage problems in your group.