

Tips for Collaborative Writing Projects

Collaborative writing projects are very common in college (and beyond). They are often quite challenging, but they can also be immensely rewarding. This resource provides an overview of the challenges that come with completing a group writing project and some advice for ensuring that the project goes smoothly. It also includes a discussion on what you can do to be a helpful group member.

The Challenges of Group Writing Projects and How to Address Them

1. It is challenging to coordinate all of the group members' schedules.

This becomes more of a challenge the larger your group is. It is essential that you meet with your group immediately after receiving the assignment so that you can discuss your individual schedules and arrange meeting times. Consider appointing a group “secretary,” whose role is to write down everyone’s schedule and figure out the best times to schedule meetings. You may also take advantage of virtual meeting platforms like Zoom, which is free to download at zoom.us. Finally, there are several free scheduling websites that can assist in coordinating everyone’s availability, such as [Doodle.com](https://doodle.com), needtomeet.com, and setmore.com.

Google Docs allows all group members to access the project simultaneously and make revisions that are automatically saved. This prevents the need to constantly email each other with the latest version of the project. However, it is also a good idea for each group member to regularly save the document on their personal device just in case it gets deleted or substantially altered.

2. It is challenging for group members to stay in communication with each other.

As soon as you know whom you are working with, contact your partners to determine the most convenient avenues of communication for your group. **Communication is the most important element of a successful group project.** All group members should be able to communicate via Cottey email, but you may opt to establish additional platforms of communication, such as a group text or private social media page. All group members should have equal access to these platforms.

3. One or more group members do not do their fair share of the work or are nonresponsive to communication attempts.

Again, communication is the most important factor in successful group work, so if you sense that a group member is not contributing enough to the project, the rest of the group should attempt to communicate that concern to the group member. If the group member is nonresponsive to this attempt, bring the matter to your instructor’s attention.

4. One or more group members do too much work and/or do not consider other group members' ideas and suggestions.

Once again, your first strategy should be direct communication with the group member about her behavior. If the group member is nonresponsive to this attempt, bring the matter to your instructor’s attention.

5. Collaborative writing assignments are challenging because writing is usually done independently.

While it may be beneficial for individual group members to do their own independent work on the project, whenever possible, your group should try to do most of the writing when all group members are present. **All members of the group should have an equal say in how all parts of the project are written.** Dividing up the project such that one group member independently writes one section, another group member writes another, and so on—and then combining those individual sections together and turning in the paper— is risky, for a couple of reasons: (1) every group member has a unique writing style, and it is usually very obvious to readers when one person has stopped and

another has started writing; you want a consistent tone, writing style, and format across the entire paper, and (2) every group member needs to be aware of what content the rest of the paper includes; otherwise, they may repeat things that have already been covered, or they may assume something has been covered when it has not.

Technologies like Google Docs make it convenient for group members to work independently on the project on their own time, but you should still maximize the number of occasions where all group members can participate in the writing process. Before turning in the final paper, every group member should read the paper to ensure that there is consistency in tone and writing style.

How You Can Be a Good Group Member

1. Play to your strengths.

For example, if you know you excel at time management, you might offer to be your group's designated scheduler or "secretary." If you're good at taking notes, you might offer to be your group's "scribe," whose role is to take notes of what happens and gets discussed during group meetings. If you excel at research, you might offer to find secondary sources. In any case, discuss with your group how you can use your specific strengths to maximize your contributions to the overall project.

2. Stay in regular communication with your group.

You should be checking your Cottey email at least once a day, and you should also regularly check any other communicative platforms your group decides to use. Keep your partners aware of how you are contributing to the project with a daily "check-in" message to the whole group.

3. Make a deliberate effort to attend all group meetings.

The key word here is *effort*: unforeseen events may cause you to miss or be late for a group meeting. If this happens, let your group know as soon as possible, apologize, and offer to compensate for your absence or tardiness by taking on more work. Communication is key.

4. Do enough work.

Complete the tasks that you have been given (or offered to do) in a timely fashion, and share your work openly with the rest of your group. If you feel you have been given too much work or are struggling to complete your tasks, communicate that concern with your group sooner rather than later.

5. Don't do too much work.

Some students would prefer to simply take complete control of the project, perhaps because they fear their partners will bring their grade down. This is a bad idea because (1) you miss out on the unique contributions that each group member brings to the project and (2) some of your partners will likely resent you for excluding them from the project. It is fine to have a designated group leader, but **every group member should have a role to play**. At your first group meeting, take a moment to assess each group member's strengths, and use that information to relegate tasks.

6. Stay open-minded to other group members' ideas.

Listen to your partners and their ideas. While you will eventually have to reach a group consensus on how to proceed, no one's ideas and suggestions should be outright dismissed or ignored. A good response might be, "That's an interesting suggestion. What do we think about that?" In general, use plural language like "we," "us," and "our" rather than singular language like "I," "me," and "my" to help establish a sense of camaraderie among your group.

This resource was prepared by the Cottey College Writing Center.

<https://cottey.edu/campus-community/kolderie-center/learning-center/writing-center/>