



Writing together

Collaborative writing

We'll be honest. Writing as a group is not easy. There are several models you might follow, such as the **models for 'Sharing and organising work online' described by UNSW**, where either one person writes a lot, or each person writes a bit, or everyone writes jointly. Each method has its pros and cons, and whatever approach your group takes, you need to make sure the division of labour is fair and that you follow any assessment guidelines.



It turns out that there is a lot of ongoing research into the collaborative writing process (see for example Dillon, 1993; Hill, 2003). Wolfe (2010, p. 6) identifies three types of collaborative models:

1. Face-to-face: teams work together in person, usually with one person typing or writing at a time.
2. Divided: each team member works on a section or two of the assignment.
3. Layered: each team member is assigned a specific role. Team members work on the document in stages, adding layers and revising each other's work.

Each model has its pros and cons, depending on the type of task. A combination of methods and models may also be used. **The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill instead conceptualises collaboration as a spectrum.**

However your team does the work, we suggest the following activity to keep things going smoothly:



Activity: Assessment plan

1. Develop a team report plan: discuss the structure of the assignment, the number of sections, and the function of each section.
2. Allocate roles for each section: instead of putting one person in charge per section, share the workload so that each part has a main writer and a reviewer. You might add a proofreading role as well. Use this table:

Section	Writer	Reviewer 1	Reviewer 2

3. Conduct a team review: go over the assignment as a team long before it's due. Make sure everything is clear, the structure is logical, and the document is coherent. Compare your work against the marking criteria and standards. Make revisions as appropriate.

Other tips for collaborative writing

Digitise

Go digital early on, and set up a document in Google Drive or a similar platform that multiple people can edit at the same time.

Communicate

Communicating about the writing is just as important as the writing itself. Don't make changes without discussion unless you've been allocated as proofreader. Instead, use 'track changes' in Word or 'Suggesting Mode' in Google Docs or a similar tool so that your changes and suggestions can be viewed by all and only made if everyone agrees. Pen and paper hard copy editing can also be a particularly effective mode of editing and proofreading, not least because it's often easier to catch mistakes on paper than on a computer screen.

Whatever you use, just make sure that everyone is kept up to date and that everybody knows which version of the document is the most recent. Your group might need to come up with a roster or schedule for writing and editing, and stick to it. That might sound like a lot of work to begin with, but it will save time later. Use the grid in [Assigning Tasks](#) (PDF, 31 kB) or the table above to help you decide on who will do what and when.

Edit and proofread

Writing is not a one-step process. Don't forget the redrafting, editing, and rewriting stages. One approach is to assign different parts of the first draft to different people. Then have a meeting and go over the first draft as a team. What can be improved? What else needs to be done? Rewrite together or separately, and then come together again to discuss.

Then it's time to **proofread and polish** (PDF, 52 kB). You can do this as a group, or take turns checking each other's work. The important thing is not to proofread the parts that you've written, because you'll never pick up all the errors that someone new will.

Keep it fair

Lastly, remember to keep it fair and make sure everyone contributes to the process. Remember also not to plagiarise, either from sources or from each other. Visit our **Study with Integrity** page to find out more, especially about collusion. If things go wrong, find help with our **strategies for dealing with conflict** (PDF, 61 kB).

More information

- Web-based tools you can use: **5 tools for collaborative writing**
- UNSW: **Group work** – see especially the 'Team writing' and 'Collaborative writing' sections
- The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill: **Group Writing**

References

- Dillon, A. (1993). How collaborative is collaborative writing? An analysis of the production of two technical reports. In M. Sharples (Ed.), *Computer supported collaborative writing* (pp. 69-86). London, England: Springer-Verlag.
- Hill, B. M. (2003). *Collaborative literary creation and control: A socio-historic, technological and legal analysis*. Retrieved from https://mako.cc/academic/collablit/writing/BenjMakoHill-CollabLit_and_Control.pdf
- Wolfe, J. (2010). *Team writing: A guide to working in groups*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.