

CHAPTER 15: WRITING AS A TEAM

Engineers and scientists in both industry and academia often team up to write. This collaboration allows them to split up their work, pool their strengths and talents, and solve difficult intellectual and business problems. Sometimes one member of the team will write a draft, especially when the document is relatively short, and the others will edit it. At other times, each member will contribute sections or appendices, and hand it over to another member to assemble. Then that member will turn it over to others on the team for editing.

15.1 GUIDELINES FOR WRITING AS A TEAM

Depending on how you approach it, writing as a team can be an efficient and effective way to write—or a burdensome procedure. The following guidelines can help you save time and produce effective documents.

- Work as a team, not as a group. To write successfully as a team, you must first be a real team. As you may recall, a team is a “group of two or more people working together in an interdependent manner to achieve shared...goals” (O’Brien, 1995, p. 3). A group of people might like each other and work well together, but they are not a real team if they don’t work interdependently to accomplish goals they all believe are important. Writing as a team means that you do the following:
 - Decide as a team what you want to accomplish in the piece of writing.
 - Select a leadership structure and a fair way of dividing the work.
 - Create a schedule and set deadlines; then do your part to follow the schedule.
 - Keep the lines of communication open, whether it’s to share ideas or problems; make sure everyone gets heard.
 - Draw on members’ individual strengths and contributions.
 - Keep your goal in mind and don’t let petty annoyances distract you.
- Develop a set of research questions and an outline. These strategies will help you focus better and thus save time. Once you’ve completed

your research, organize your findings and then meet to discuss them. Then decide the goal of your introduction, the purpose of each section of the report or presentation, and a method for dividing up the writing.

- Agree on a consistent style and format. To save time later in the project, decide on font style and size, type of headings, personal pronouns (using “we” to refer to work done by the team), and other such considerations.
- After you produce a draft, have one team member revise it. A team paper should read as if it were written by one person. That is, it should be consistent in tone, style, sentence structure, and level of detail.
- Have the whole group read an almost-finished draft. Members should be on the lookout for errors or omissions of any kind, and sections that need more explanation or argument, or that might benefit from a figure or table. Keep in mind that when your name goes on an article or report, you are responsible for everything in it.
- Give and receive criticism of the draft with respect. Whether you’re giving or receiving criticism of the draft, be open-minded. Your goal is to produce a clear, persuasive report.
- Have one team member edit the final copy. This includes carefully proofreading all headings and references, which tend to be the most error-ridden parts of a document. Make sure the document looks attractive and professional.

15.2 REFERENCES

O’Brien, M. (1995). *Who's got the ball? (and other nagging questions about team life)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.