

Working and Writing in Groups

Group work can be a frightening prospect for many people, especially in a school setting when so much of what we do is only graded if it has been completed individually. Some of these fears are unfounded, but others are well founded and can be addressed by being careful about how group work is set up. Group work will take more time than if you did it by yourself. There is no way around this, so be prepared. Even if you divide up many of the early tasks (research, etc.) which lessens the time you might put in individually, writing a collaborative paper takes a lot of time. Some people think, "I'll end up doing all the work." Unless you are unwilling to give up control or speak up for yourself, this should not happen. Although the reality is that some people will try to get away with doing less, the chances of having a completely uncommitted group are rare. As a result, you simply have to watch for the tendency to think you "know better" than others and thus must do it all yourself and/or the attitude that your grade will suffer because everything isn't done the way you want it.

Positive Aspects of Working within a Group

1. In group work, you can draw on each group member's knowledge and perspectives, frequently giving you a more well thought out paper at the end or a better understanding of the class material for exams, etc.
2. You can also draw on people's different strengths. For example, you might be a great proofreader while someone else is much better at organizing papers.
3. Groups are great for motivation; they force you to be responsible to others and frequently, then, do more and better work on a project than you might when only responsible to yourself.
4. Group work helps keep you on task. It is harder to procrastinate when working with others. In business, industry, and research organizations, collaborative work is the norm rather than the exception.
5. Even if you are an excellent writer, collaboratively written papers are usually better than a single-authored one if for no other reason than the content is better: it is better researched, more well thought out, includes more perspectives, etc. Writing a good final draft of a collaboratively written paper does take work that all group members should be prepared to do.

In Order to Collaborate Successfully, You Should:

- ◆ Plan the work, as well as the actual document outline (after the group has come to an understanding of its purpose and set goals to achieve the task at hand).
- ◆ Divide the writing tasks.
- ◆ Leave enough time for revising, editing, and proofreading.
- ◆ Be critical (gather information, share it with all group members and examine it critically).

Information is from *Business & Administrative Communication* by Kitty Locker (2000).