

Writing Essays as a Group

Why write in a group?

- Although many students dislike the idea of writing an essay as a group, it does have some advantages:
 - It allows students to become better prepared for the workplace by honing skills that don't often get used in the individualistic university setting.
 - It allows students to accomplish more than they could have by working alone.
 - It allows students to gain insights into how their peers construct a paper, which may encourage them to reevaluate their own methods.

How to work efficiently as a group

1. **Communicate:** This is a vital component of working together successfully. Before the research and writing stages even begin, students need to sit down together and establish what it is they want to accomplish. Once the other stages commence, group members need to keep each other informed of their progress.
2. **Plan:** If the group creates a plan in the beginning, setting out who is responsible for what, members are less likely to feel that one person is not pulling their weight. Sticking with the plan and communicating with each other throughout the entire process also ensure the group members will be able to monitor one another's work and make certain that everyone is working towards a common goal.
3. **Be realistic:** If group members are upfront in the beginning about their strengths and weaknesses, the group can address these situations as a whole. Time restraints and schedules also have to be taken into consideration. Setting goals or work plans that are unrealistic can lead to failure and resentment within the group.
4. **Be Considerate:** Working with group members can be hard when personalities clash. Remember that not everyone learns in the same way, nor do they follow the same methodology when working. Working as a group is a process of give and take. If everyone keeps the goal of a successful paper in mind, it is easier to negotiate and work towards the common goal.
5. **Stay involved:** All group members should understand the topic, so being involved in the research process is important. Throughout the research stage, it is important that each member keeps a record of their sources so that when it comes time to compile references, everything is easy to find.

6. Divide up the tasks: Dividing up tasks by having one person research, one person write and one person edit is not the best way to approach a group essay. By having each member do a share of work throughout each stage, the paper really does become more of a collaborative effort. Each member should be involved in the planning, researching and writing stages. Assigning one person to review the paper at the end to ensure one voice is maintained is a good idea, but that one person should not be writing the whole thing.
7. Speak Up! Students need to remember that they are all part of the group and each of their names will be on the final product that is handed in. If there is something that they do not feel comfortable with in the paper, then they should speak up and let the other group members know. The same academic integrity policies apply to group work as they do to individual assignments.
8. Maintain consistency: Everyone has different writing styles and this can sometimes be evident within group papers. In order to effectively achieve one unified voice throughout a group essay, individual styles should be set aside. There should be consistency in regards to citation style, visual aspects (such as font, use of headings, etc...), and general tone.

Remember, writing as a group can be challenging, but it can also be rewarding!

Working together teaches students important skills such as time management, patience and compromise that are sometimes overlooked in university courses. All of these skills will be helpful in a student's future, whether it be in graduate studies or in a job setting. There is no need to fear a group paper!

Resources

- Ede, L. & Lunsford, A. (1983). Why write . . . together? *Rhetoric Review*, 1(2), 150-157.
- Faigley, L., Graves, R. & Graves, H. (2008). *The brief penguin handbook* (Canadian ed.). Toronto: Pearson Education Canada.