

Reflections on Collaborative Writing

Kristine Acosta

In my time as an undergraduate student, I always saw writing as a solitary activity. I thought of writing as a task that was best completed in quiet seclusion with minimal distractions. I considered writing to be highly personal and contemplative. In my mind, there was no room for outside influences that could shut down my own voice and perspective. Writing was a product with a beginning, middle, and end that only I could shape based on my own experiences.

While, as an English major, I was introduced to the concept of collaboration through group projects, classroom assignments, and interactive discussions, I never thought of collaboration as playing a role in the act of writing itself. This changed when I entered graduate school and was exposed to the concept of collaborative writing. I soon learned that having multiple writers work together on texts in the field of writing studies was not only common practice but encouraged by the field itself.

As a result, I was faced with the question of how to practice collaborative writing when I had never formerly been taught how to engage in this kind of writing in my academic studies. Looking back, there are five things about collaborative writing that I wish I had known sooner:

Project management is just as important as the final product itself.

When it comes to collaborative writing, the division of labor and the expectations of each writer should be clearly delineated and expressed at the very beginning of a writing project. It is not enough to simply have an idea about what each person will be writing about; collaborative writing requires organization surrounding the very structure of the text being produced. Outlines for writing can be very helpful, as are discussions on how to structure the intended argument based on each writer's particular strengths and interests. There must also be clarity on when each person will have to complete their portions of writing in order to maximize workflow and timely results. Clear timelines for each individual, with check-ins holding writers accountable for their workloads throughout the writing process, are also pivotal for the successful completion of a piece of writing.

It is crucial to make time to regularly meet with fellow writers when working on a writing project.

Do not just meet once to assign roles and expectations for those you are working with. Instead, meet often throughout the writing process and make sure to have writers share their progress, successes, and struggles along the way. Share questions and reflections with one another and leave space for brainstorming of new approaches and ideas that may have not been thought of before. Some of the best ideas for writing projects have come about as a result of collaborative writing meetings where members of the team

simply bounce ideas off one another and consider new approaches for sharing information.

Discussions and disagreements are part of the process.

Do not shy away from differences of opinion when it comes to approaches to writing. One of the most beautiful aspects of collaborative writing is its ability to merge multiple perspectives and approaches in a single text. Every person in a collaborative writing team brings their own background, knowledge, and life experiences to the writing process. With that comes certain individual expectations for appropriate approaches and considerations within text creation and elaboration. There will be times when all members of a team will be unable to agree on best practices, and that is okay. Look at differences of opinions as opportunities to have conversations with your fellow writers and to practice better understanding diverse points of view. The negotiations made in such discussions will not only mirror other similar professional situations but will produce stronger writing. The important thing is to not give up on a project simply because the writing process and collaboration is difficult. It is vital to enter difficult conversations being open-minded about solutions that take into account the wants and needs of all parties.

Having fun is imperative.

Collaborative writing is intended to be a social and engaging experience. We often get wrapped up in the idea that writing must be written with a specific end goal in mind and that we cannot engage in any activity that can distract us from reaching that target. Building community with the writers who are a part of the writing project you are working on not only fosters a sense of belonging but also improves morale and engagement. Get to know one another and enjoy the process. It is okay not to be serious the whole time. Make jokes, laugh, share stories, and insights. This camaraderie will improve rapport and make collaboration feel more seamless. Once you feel more comfortable around your fellow collaborators, your writing will also flow more organically, allowing for easier development of ideas.

In a time where it seems as though everything is ultra-individualized and there exists immense pressure to capitalize on one's own strengths and experiences, it is equally important to work together in a team, uplifting diverse perspectives. Writing with multiple collaborators allows for fresh and innovative approaches to the presentation of information. It also provides an opportunity to share workloads and support one another's academic and career goals. Collaborative writing allows for opportunities to uplift multiple voices at once and to enhance the delivery of claims based on various entry points of expertise. So do not be afraid to move beyond writing alone. Lean on others and share the writing process with them. Collaborative writing is a journey you will not regret taking.