# Chapter 7: Collaboration and Peer Review

## Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, readers will be able to:

1. Define collaborative writing and distinguish it from group or team writing based on mindset, goals, and shared responsibility.
2. Explain the benefits and challenges of collaborative writing, including its impact on workplace culture, diversity, and product quality.
3. Apply effective strategies for collaborative writing, such as setting clear objectives, creating style guides, maintaining ethical standards, and managing team dynamics.
4. Plan and execute a collaborative writing project, including scheduling, assigning tasks, tracking contributions, and integrating multiple drafts into a cohesive document.
5. Conduct peer reviews effectively, using constructive feedback techniques and evaluation checklists to improve drafts and support revision.

## Introduction to Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing—also known as group writing, team writing, and distributed writing—describe what it means to perform collective writing in a professional atmosphere. For our purposes we will refer to the act of writing together as collaborative writing, though we will explain the differences later in this chapter.

Collaboration involves a mindset that sees the whole as more important than its parts.

In other words, when people decide to collaborate, they are actively setting aside their individual goals for the good of the group or company they represent. Collaboration seeks to combine multiple skill sets, knowledge bases, ideas and engagement from a group people for the sole purpose of accomplishing a goal that benefits all. A collaborative mindset is focused on company success more than it is individual success.

Conversely, team and group writing tends to focus on gathering to accomplish a set goal for a certain project during a specific time or event. It does not necessarily entail a long-term, ingrained mindset that seeks constant success for the good of the company or group. Collaboration differs from team and group writing because it requires each member to be responsible for the outcome. Collaboration is the reason that companies such as Cisco and Coca Cola thrive. According to Ron Ricci and Carl Wiese, authors of The Collaboration Imperative (2011), a company’s success lies within the people they employ. “It’s not hiding in a budget spreadsheet or a warehouse full of inventory. It lies within your people—in their ideas, their experiences, their focus, their energy. The more you empower them to share their knowledge and skills, the more successful your organization will be. From ideas come innovation and new forms of productivity.”

In their 2015 book Collaboration Begins with You: Be a Silo Buster, best-selling author and management expert Ken Blanchard along with co-authors Jane Ripley and Eunice Parisi-Carew discuss what collaboration means. “Collaboration is a whole order of magnitude beyond teams. It’s in the DNA of the company culture,” they write. The authors continue, “It’s an environment that promotes communication, learning, maximum contribution, and innovation – which, of course, all lead to healthy profits.” Thus, successful collaborative writing stems from a company culture that invites collaboration not just writing by way of teams and groups.

Collaborative writing, then, can be defined as...

a group of people who gathering to write documentation, produce images, provide subtext, and more in a joint effort to bring a project to completion. Members can work in spaces that are face-to-face or virtual. The main goal of collaborative writing is to produce the best work for the good of the company by including the ideas and skill sets of multiple authors.

##### Why Write Collaboratively

As our fast-paced society becomes more dependent on information, technology, and social media, it is increasingly necessary to engage people who are able to contribute a varied set of skills and specialties who come from various cultures in an effort to produce information that best reflects the company it represents. Today, people in government, science, and technology are called upon on a regular basis to communicate large bodies of information in the best and most cost-efficient way possible with an outcome that allows a broad range of people from various backgrounds and walks of life to not only access the information, but also to understand the information set forth. Thus, collaborative groups of writers have become more important than ever, making information even more accessible to multiple groups of people.

Collaborative writing, like all other types of writing, is something that requires exercising the process of writing. And it is something that requires time and labor. But the results can be rewarding. Companies worldwide have found that writing collaboratively can produce favorable outcomes for their better interests. Collaborative writing has many advantages, but disadvantages can arise if the project morphs into team or group writing.

### Successful Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing has many benefits. Because many companies believe the advantages of collaborative writing outweigh the disadvantages, many companies choose to have employees work together on projects with writers as a part of those teams.

Nevertheless, the positive results often attained on company projects rely heavily on the formulation of the team, skill sets, and positive group dynamics, something we’ll talk about a little later. For now, let’s look at the advantages of collaborative writing below.

**Collaborative writing creates a more enjoyable work environment**. Because members of the team share the responsibilities of the project or writing, they must communicate verbally, electronically, and in some instances they must communicate virtually. These interactions often work to improve and foster a collegial atmosphere, producing a workplace that adds to the overall good of the company.

**Collaborative writing creates a product that considers diverse audiences**. When a team is created with the intention of promoting diversity, the work they produce tends to be more sensitive to many cultures and audiences. For instance, if the team incorporates the skill sets of members of the LGBTQ community, cisgender people, and members of various races and cultures, the final product will have taken into account the complexities of multiple communities, which is not so easily attained by a single community of writers.

**Collaborative writing provides an opportunity for employees—both new and not-so-new—to explore skills as both leaders and subordinate team members**. A sage once said, “To be a good leader, you must learn to follow.” A successful leader is one who has learned to follow. Often, employees allowed to rise through the ranks become the most successful leaders because they understand the tasks and empathize with the challenges they create. Likewise, when organizations choose to rotate the roles of team members, it allows employees to participate in a variety of roles such as team lead, recorder, researcher, editor, reporter, and more.

**Collaborative writing fosters engagement through active learning**. When employees write collaboratively, they have the opportunity to learn from colleagues who may be more adept at a certain skill than they are.

**Collaborative writing helps to grow the organization**. When all team members view their contribution as imperative to the success of the project, they contribute as an owner rather than a worker, ultimately affecting the bottom line—profit. When a company thrives due to fully engaged employees who see their contributions as the driving force behind its success, its longevity is inevitable.

**Collaborative writing produces a superior product or outcome**. When performed correctly (see notes above about what true collaborative writing is and is not), the end result of the project will be more successful than an outside produced collaboration because the members of the team will have drawn on their commitment to the end result for the good of the company.

**Collaborative writing draws on the use of technology**. With the emergence of so many new collaboration tools and other technological advances designed to make writing more efficient, employees are better able to engage with their colleagues and produce projects in less time and with fewer obstacles than they could without those tools. There are various types of collaboration tools, including e-mail, project management software such as Slack, video conferencing software such as Zoom, and collaborative document editing tools such as Google Docs.

### A Look at Successful Collaboration

#### Establish Clear Objectives and Tasks

Successful collaboration is created using several strategies, including the ability to establish clear objectives and tasks. Just as with individual writing, team writing must employ clear objectives, and the success of the project hinges on the clarity of those objectives from the outset. Clear objectives serve as a goal or end result the team aims to achieve.

Each member of the team should have clearly defined roles and expectations from the beginning. Not only should they know their specific parts, but they should also have an understanding of the connection of that part to the tasks and roles of other team members. Each member should see their role as important; one which, if not completed with an inside-out mindset[[1]](#footnote-1), will negatively impact the project.

It is important, then, that the team develop a space to meet and discuss the project—to ask questions, share ideas, provide input on the overall project, etc.

#### Conduct Effective Meetings

Another strategy of successful collaboration is the ability to conduct effective meetings that allow members to openly share their views and expertise. The outcome of these meetings is often contingent on the ability of the team to employ careful listening skills and confining topics within careful parameters. The difference in the two—listening versus hearing—is defined by intent and purpose. In The Science and Art of Listening (2012), Seth Horowitz (2012) delineates the two this way: “The difference between the sense of hearing and the skill of listening is attention.” To listen versus hear what is being said, then, you must choose (or intend) to understand what is being said, you must give your attention to what is being said. Listening is a skill that we’re in danger of losing in a world of digital distraction and information overload…The richness of life doesn’t lie in the loudness and the beat, but in the timbres and the variations that you can discern if you simply pay attention.”

#### Set a Project Schedule

Successful collaboration is also dependent upon a clearly stated project schedule. There is an abundance of tools that enable teams to successfully achieve their end result by having a clear view of what is needed and when. Tools such as Slack, Monday, and Microsoft Teams, among others, allow teams to know the schedule of their project and see the progress throughout.

#### Keep Them Honest

Maintaining a sense of ethical responsibility toward the project and its team members is imperative to the success of the project. In Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases (2011), Manuel G. Velasquez outlines ethical standards that are helpful to consider in collaborative situations. You can also read more about these in Chapter 23: Ethics.

* Rights: Everyone has a right to engage in intellectual discussions at work without fear of reprisal. Likewise, when a document or product is produced, the public has a right to expect that honesty was central in its production.
* Justice: Everyone should receive the same justice regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation. Team members should be treated equally so as to not alienate anyone and, in turn, derail the project.
* Utility: Consideration should be given for how group decisions will impact all involved. When the group operates as one unit, members will consider the impact that decisions will have on each of its members. The idea of operating individually is tossed because it is understood that what affects one affects all.
* Care: Because the group operates from the "inside-out" mindset (heart-head-hand), care is given to those who are closest to members and with whom members work.

#### Encourage Discussion and Diversity

Finally, successful collaboration is contingent upon the very definition of collaboration as discussed earlier in the chapter. Fostering an environment that promotes communication, learning, maximum contribution, and innovation. (Blanchard, Ripley, Parisi-Carew, 2012). In other words, team members must feel comfortable sharing and at times debating about their ideas. Members should be allowed to fully operate in the diversity they bring to the team. No team member should be made to feel that their contribution is less important than that of other team members because they may be disabled. Likewise, a team member who is a part of the LGBTQ community, even if their sexual orientation is not considered a part of the majority in the workplace, should be allowed to communicate ideas on the project from their perspective. Allowing a contribution of ideas from diverse perspectives is best for the project because it takes into consideration the diverse audience who will most likely be the readers of the project. In the end, openness in discussion creates a product that considers the audience, a primary rule in writing for technical audiences.

In his article "6 Fundamentals of Effective Collaboration" (2010) that appeared in Talent Culture World of Work, Chris Jones, an IT Strategy and Change Management consultant, muses on his "secret sauce" ingredients for effective collaboration. Jones identifies six ideas he insists are necessary for effective collaboration.

* Engagement
* Keeping it real (being authentic)
* A bias for learning and discovery
* Respect for community members
* Driving a positive vibe
* Focus on results

Notice the similarities between the four standards identified by Velasquez (2011) and the six ideas listed by Jones (2010). Indeed, without these, collaboration in writing or in any other team setting will not be successful.

### Ineffective Collaborative Writing

When collaborative writing morphs back to a team or silo mindset, it creates situations that work against the good of the group. Keep the following in mind as you establish your team and as you work through the project.

**Avoid the "Me" syndrome** where too many people seek the role of leadership. When a clear hierarchy and roles have not been established in the group, the inevitable outcome is that you develop disjointed teams, thereby developing a disjointed project, taking away from the collaborative environment.

**Avoid the development of a multi-voice project** where an agreed upon voice does not come through in the project. Having an agreed upon style sheet can help to alleviate this problem. Another strategy to avoid creating a multi-voice project is to establish a team member or members as editors who review the final draft, checking specifically for the voice and tone of the message.

**Avoid the tendency to have one or a few people shoulder the load of the team**, which is sometimes created when ethical standards are not maintained. When some members of the team feel de-valued, they often feel alienated and tend to lose motivation to work, often abandoning the project.

**Avoid the tendency to engage in groupthink** where members care more about getting along and becoming friends than they do about the goal of the project.

**Avoid the tendency to side with certain persons based on traits held in common** when a conflict arises. Always maintain the goal and purpose of the project so that conflict resolution is paramount for the good of the team and the project.

## Strategies for Collaborative Writing

### Assembling the Team

When you begin selecting team members for a writing project in a technical writing course, choose people with varying backgrounds and interests. Just as a diverse, well-rounded background for an individual writer is an advantage, a group of diverse individuals makes for a well-rounded writing team.

Consider asking prospective team members for their background, interests, majors, talents, and aptitudes. The following writing teams combine individuals with diverse backgrounds and interests:

***Writing Team 1***  
  
Project: A report on current cloaking technologies  
  
Team members; backgrounds, skills, interests

* Shawn S. - Electrical engineering major, currently in an office-management role at a law firm
* Tracey K. - Senior English major, taking this course ahead of applying for a technical communications graduate program
* Sanjiv G. - Computer science major, currently doing graphic design at a software development startup
* Jeon Chang Y. - Soon-to-be electrical engineering major, still developing English language skills
* Alice B. - Interdisciplinary Studies major focusing on visual arts and criminal justice

### Planning the Project

Once you've assembled your writing team, most of the work is the same as it would be if you were writing by yourself, except that each phase is a team effort. Specifically, meet with your team to decide or plan the following:

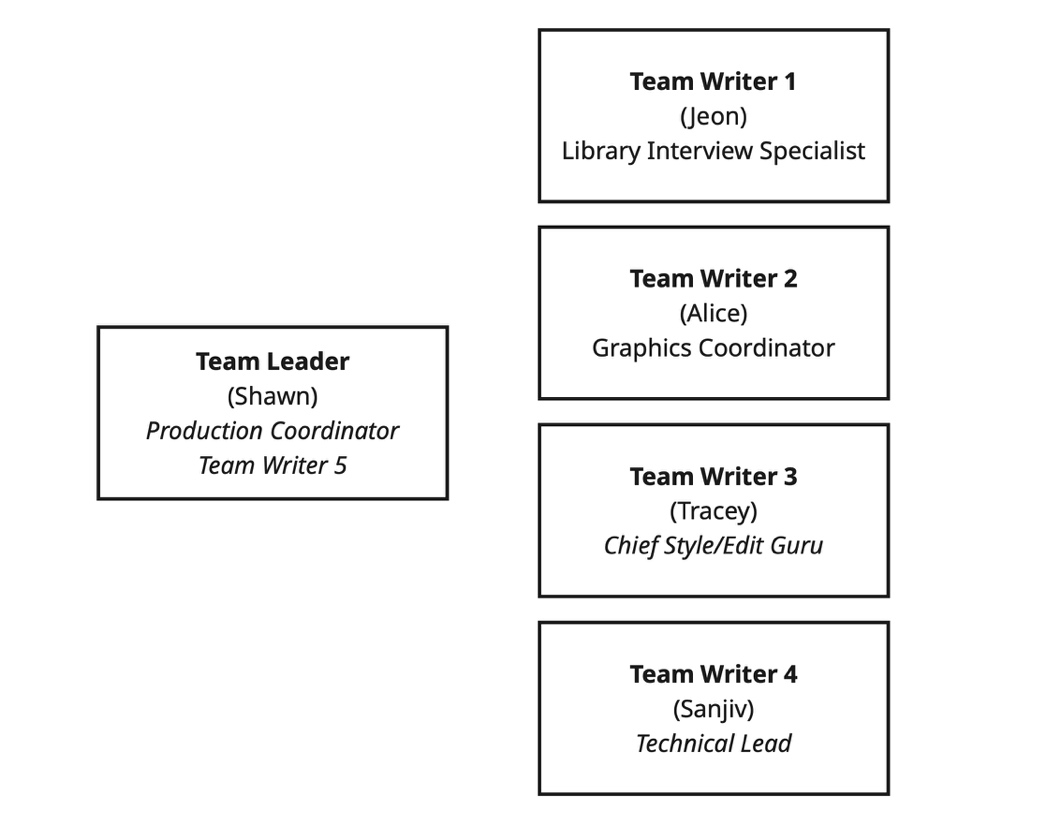
* Analyze the writing assignment.
* Pick a topic.
* Define the audience, purpose, and writing situation.
* Brainstorm and narrow the topic.
* Create an outline.
* Plan the information search (for books, articles, etc., in the library).
* Plan a system for taking notes from information sources.
* Plan any graphics you'd like to see in your writing project.
* Agree on style and format questions (see the following discussion).
* Develop a work schedule for the project and divide the responsibilities (see the following).

Much of the work in a team-writing project must be done by individual team members on their own. However, if your team decides to divide up the work for the writing project, try for at least these minimum guidelines:

* Assign each team member the responsibility of writing one major section of the paper, but have the whole team give input on each section during review and revision stages.
* Each team member is responsible for locating, reading, and taking notes on an equal part of the information sources.

Some of the work for the project that could be done as a team you may want to do first independently. For example, brainstorming, narrowing, and especially outlining should be done first by each team member on his own; then get together and compare notes. Keep in mind how group dynamics can unknowingly suppress certain ideas and how less assertive team members might be reluctant to contribute their valuable ideas in the group context.

After you've divided up the work for the project, write a formal chart and distribute it to all the members.



*Figure 1: Chart listing writing team members' responsibilities for the project*

### Scheduling the Project and Balancing Workload

Early in your team writing project, set up a schedule of key dates. This schedule will enable you and your team members to make steady, organized progress and complete the project on time. As shown in the example schedule below, include not only completion dates for key phases of the project but also meeting dates and the subject and purpose of those meetings. Notice these details about that schedule:

* Several meetings are scheduled in which members discuss the information they are finding or are not finding. (One team member may have information another member is looking everywhere for.)
* Several meetings are scheduled to review the project details, specifically, the topic, audience, purpose, situation, and outline. As you learn more about the topic and become more settled in the project, your team may want to change some of these details or make them more specific.
* Several rough drafts are scheduled. Team members peer-review each other's drafts of individual sections twice, the second time to see if the recommended changes have worked. Once the complete draft is put together, it, too, is reviewed twice.

**Example Schedule for a Team Writing Project**

| Task | Deadline |
| --- | --- |
| Individual prototypes due | October 1 |
| Team meeting: finalize prototype | October 1 |
| Rough-draft style guide due | October 5 |
| Team meeting: finalize style guide | October 5 |
| Twice-weekly team meetings: progress & problems | October 5-26 |
| Graphics sketches due to Alice | October 14 |
| Rough drafts of individual sections due | October 26 |
| Review of rough drafts due | October 28 |
| Team meeting: discuss rough drafts, reviews | October 28 |
| Update of style guide due from Tracey | October 31 |
| Revisions of rough drafts due to reviewers | November 3 |
| Final graphics due from Alice | November 5 |
| Completed drafts to Tracey: final edit/proof | November 7 |
| Team meeting: review completed drafts with final graphics and editing | November 12 |
| Completed drafts due to Shawn for final production | November 15 |
| Team meeting: inspection of completed project | November 15 |
| Project upload due to Sanjiv | November 16 |
| Party at Shawn’s | November 19 |

When you work as a team, one member may have more or less than a fair share of the load sometimes. Therefore, it's important to find a way to keep track of what each team member is doing. A good way to do that is to have each team member keep a journal or log of what kind of work they do and how much time they spend doing it.

At the end of the project, if anyone has spent a little more than their share of time working, the other members can make up for it by doing more of the finish-up work such as typing, proofing, or copying.

### Setting Up a Style Guide or Style Sheet

Because the individual sections will be written by different writers from varying backgrounds, set up a style guide that your team members are in agreement with how things are to be handled in the paper. These agreements can range from the high level, such as whether to have a background section, all the way down to picky details such as when to use italics or bold and whether it is "click" or "click on." See the excerpt from a project style sheet in the following.

Because you can't expect to cover every possible difference in style and format in early drafts, plan to update this style sheet upon reviewing each individual section drafts and, especially, when you review the complete draft. See the following example style sheet:

**Highlighting**

* Use bold for interface elements that function like commands (for example, the **Exit** button).
* Use bold for menu options that get you to commands (for example, **File>Open**).
* Use the **>** symbol to abbreviate menu traversal.
* Use Courier New for example text that users type in (for example, myfile.doc).
* Use italics for variables--placeholder text for which users substitute their own information (for example, filename.doc).

**Hyphenation**

* Individual words. Turn automatic hyphenation off. Do not hyphenate words except in tight places like tables or graphics.
* *Compounds*. Hyphen Master Tracey will keep the hyphenated-compounds list. Use only those in their list and submit new ones to them for approval and inclusion on the list. Hyphenate compounds only for approval and inclusion on the list. Hyphenate compounds only when they modify (for example, "back-up copy"), not when they act as nouns or verbs (for example, "to back up your files.")

**Terminology**

* Use only the words in **graph\_project.dic**. Tracey approves all new words for that database.
* Use the same word for the same object, same process, or same action. No elegant variation, please!

### Reviewing Drafts and Finishing

Try to schedule frequent team meetings to review rough draft progress.

A critical stage in team-writing a paper comes when you put together into one complete draft those individual sections written by different team members. You may notice differences in tone, treatment, and style within each section. As a group, you must find common ground to revise and edit the complete rough draft for consistency and cohesiveness. If your instructor allows it, this is a good opportunity to explore generative AI as a revision tool. Many technical writers have found it to be helpful in streamlining voice and style in collaborative documents.

After reviewing and revising, it’s time to finish the draft for submission. This involves the same work as writing the paper yourself, but with workloads divided.

## Strategies for Peer Reviewing

Peer reviewing (also called peer-editing) means people getting together to read, comment on, and recommend improvements on each other's work. Peer reviewing is a good way to become a better writer because it provides experience in looking critically at writing.

### Strategies for Peer Reviewing

Peer reviewing another writer's work involves critically evaluating the work for clarity, cohesiveness, and conciseness. You will also suggest improvements and then communicate all of that to the writer. As a first-time peer reviewer, you might be a bit uneasy about criticizing someone else's work. For example, how do you tell somebody their essay fell flat? Read the discussion and steps that follow; you'll find advice and guidelines on doing peer reviews and communicating peer review comments.

#### Initial Meeting

At the beginning of a peer review, the writer should provide peer reviewers with notes on the writing assignment and on goals and concerns about the writing project (topic, audience, purpose, situation, type), and alert them to any problems or concerns. As the writer, you want to alert reviewers to these problems; make it clear what kinds of things you were trying to do. Similarly, peer reviewers should ask writers whose work they are peer reviewing to supply information on their objectives and concerns. The peer review questions should be specific like the following:

1. Does my explanation of the machine learning make sense to you? Would it make sense to our least technical customers?
2. In general, is my writing style too technical? (I may have mimicked too much of the software engineers' specifications.)
3. Are the chapter titles and headings indicative enough of the following content? (I had trouble phrasing some of these.)
4. Are the screen shots clear enough? (I may have been trying to get too much detail in some of them.)

#### Peer Reviewing Checklist

When you peer review another person’s writing, remember that you should consider all aspects of that writing, not just the grammar, spelling, and punctuation. If you are new to peer reviewing, consider using the following checklist:

* Make sure that your review is comprehensive. Consider all aspects of the draft you're reviewing, not just the grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
* Read the draft several times, looking for a complete range of potential problem areas:
  + Interest level, adaptation to audience
  + Persuasiveness, purpose
  + Content, organization
  + Clarity of discussion
  + Coherence, transitions
  + Title, introduction, and conclusion.
  + Sentence style and clarity
  + Handling of graphics
* Be careful about making comments or criticisms that are based on your own personal style. Base your criticisms and suggestions for improvements on generally accepted guidelines, concepts, and rules. If you do make a comment that is really your own preference, explain it.
* Explain the problems you find fully. Don't just say a paper "seems disorganized." Explain what is disorganized about it. Use specific details from the draft to demonstrate your case.
* Whenever you criticize something in the writer's draft, try to suggest some way to correct the problem. It's not enough to tell the writer that their paper seems disorganized, for example. Explain how that problem could be solved.
* Base your comments and criticisms on accepted guidelines, concepts, principles, and rules. It's not enough to tell a writer that two paragraphs ought to be switched, for example. State the reason why: more general, introductory information should come first, for example.
* Avoid rewriting the draft that you are reviewing. In your efforts to suggest improvements and corrections, don't go overboard and rewrite the draft yourself. Doing so steals from the original writer the opportunity to learn and improve as a writer.
* Find positive, encouraging things to say about the draft you're reviewing. Compliments, even small ones, are usually wildly appreciated. Read through the draft at least once looking for things that were done well and then let the writer know about them.

#### Peer Review Summary

Once you've finished a peer review, it's a good idea to write a summary of your thoughts, observations, impressions, criticisms, or feelings about the rough draft. See the example peer reviewer note below, which summarizes observations on a rough draft. Notice in the example some of the following details:

* The comments are categorized according to type of problem or error—grammar and usage comments in one group: higher level comments on such things as content, organization, and interest-level in another group.
* Relative importance of the groups of comments is indicated. The peer reviewer indicates which suggestions would be "nice" to incorporate and which ones are critical to the success of the writing project.
* Most of the comments include some brief statement of guidelines, rules, examples, or common sense. The reviewer doesn't simply say "This is wrong; fix it." He also explains the basis for the comment.
* Questions are addressed to the writer. The reviewer is double checking to see if the writer really meant to state or imply certain things.
* The reviewer includes positive comments to make about the rough draft and finds non-antagonistic, sympathetic ways to state criticisms.

Date: Sun, 5 Dec 1999  
From: “David A. McMurrey” [hcexres@io.com](mailto:hcexres@io.com)  
To: [julie@colltech.com](mailto:julie@colltech.com)  
Cc: xgraphic\_team  
Subject: Review of your section of xgraphics HTML project

Julie, your section of the guide is super! You’ve done several things the rest of the team ought to incorporate in their sections.

* But I do find places where it feels like there is too much text—for example, in “Using Gravity and Snap.” It’s not a major problem but I’d be looking to see if I could cut a few lines from the longer paragraphs without sacrificing detail.
* Your labels for the screen captures are really nice. You’ll have to show the rest of the team how you do it.
* You leave out generic buttons on several pages—I think the group was in agreement that \*all\* pages would have them at the bottom.
* I notice in some areas you use italics for some interface elements, bold for others. Our style guide states that we wanted bold for any screen button or similar element that makes something happen when you click it. Maybe we need to discuss the distinction you are thinking about here at our next meeting.

Spend some time summarizing your peer-review comments in a brief note to the writer. Be as diplomatic and sympathetic as you can!

## Scenarios for Consideration

### Scenario #1

You work as a technical communicator for Apple, Inc. You have been charged with pulling together a team of writers, graphic artists, and subject matter experts (SME) to produce instructions for the latest MacBook. The instructions must be produced in 30 days, a shorter time period than the three months typically given for such a project.

After assembling the team, assigning tasks and setting a schedule, you find that two of the team members, a subject matter expert and technical writer, have had past conflicts and have since found it difficult to work together. You pull the two team members aside, listen to each of their positions and insist that they leave the past behind them for the good of the project.

Two weeks pass, and you find that the two have not met to discuss their tasks. The problem with this is that other tasks given to other members of the team heavily rely on the SME and writer meeting to get the ball rolling.

As the project lead, you call the two together again to help them work through their differences. During the meeting you inform the SME that they must acknowledge her past fault for the good of the project. You say nothing to the writer about her contribution to the past conflict.

Consequently, the work on the project begins, but the spirit of the group is low at every group meeting. The project is finished, albeit two weeks late.

While presenting the finished product to the executive team, the response is negative, and you, the team lead find that the blame has been placed on you for not producing a superior product.

Questions for consideration:

* What, if anything, went wrong?
* What, if anything, could have been done differently to produce different results?
* Considering the suggestions above for successful collaboration, which guidelines were or were not followed?
* As a mentor to the team lead, what specific suggestions would you give her for her next project?

### Scenario #2

Sherry, an environmental engineer working for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), was chosen as the team lead on a project designed to provide a clearer understanding for the community of the EPA's role in the new water project being instituted for the Clean River Initiative in the Greenspane Chattahoochee Community. To fulfill her responsibility to her employer and the community, they recognized the need to produce documents—pamphlets, posters, blogs, radio advertisements—in preparation for the upcoming festival a year away to unveil the project to the community.

Sherry enlisted the help of several members from various departments of the EPA, including Valarie, a production design assistant; Ricky, a systems engineer; Gabriella, community outreach coordinator; Myron, a health educator; and Erin, technical writer.

Once assembled, Sherry explained the project and the need for the group to understand the "inside-out mindset" approach – the need to focus on the heart of the project followed by their intellect followed using their hands. In other words, Sherry explained that the results were contingent upon the entire team to see the project as something they all owned and were doing for the good of the organization and the community. "In the end," Sherry explained, "the community will benefit and have access to clean drinking water, which in turn will impact the cleanliness of all rivers."

The team came together to create a strategy for how best to communicate the message that clean rivers produce better health, which creates a stronger community. Working over a period of 12-14 months, the project came together as Sherry and her team created events that involved the community and that explained the connection of health to clean water vs. dirty water. The events included documents created by Valarie based on research produced by Diana and written by Sam. Ricky, in turn, saw to it that the documents created could be used across technological mediums such as social media, television, radio, and the internet.

The outcome was an event that the entire team and the organization could claim as their own, for they all played integral parts in making the project a success.

Questions for consideration:

* What, if anything, went wrong?
* What, if anything, could have been done differently to produce different results?
* Considering the suggestions above for successful collaboration, which guidelines were or were not followed?
* As a mentor to the team lead, what specific suggestions would you give her for her next project?

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## Attribution

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The content in Chapter 5.10 of the first edition of *Open TC* was originally sourced and revised from David McMurrey’s *Online Technical Writing*, section titled “[Strategies for Peer Reviewing and Team Writing](https://mcmassociates.io/textbook/team.html),” which is openly available under a Creative Commons Attribution license.

## AI Assistance Notice

Some parts of this chapter were brainstormed, drafted, and/or revised in conversation with ChatGPT 4o and Google Gemini 2.5 Flash. All AI-generated content was reviewed and revised as needed by a human author.

1. a term created by Blanchard, Ripley and Parisi-Carew to indicate the need for collaboration to start on the inside of a person’s heart, move to their intellect and finally to the hands – where the work occurs [↑](#footnote-ref-1)