Writing as a Team*

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* Materials adapted from R. A. Layton, "Building Student Teams"

How NOT to Do It...

- Assign tasks without first discussing the team's plan for the report
- Work separately until 3:00 a.m. the day it is due
- Paste all sections together
- Forget to proofread and edit
- Wonder why the report gets a low grade

4 Stages of Successful Collaboration

- Stage 1: Planning
- Stage 2: Drafting
- Stage 3: Revising
- Stage 4: Editing

Stage 1: Planning

- Team discusses plan for document
  - Organization, format, possible sections
  - Style (font, headings, graphics, etc.) – saves time if all can use same template
  - Team voice (passive vs. active; I vs. we; tense)
- Sections of the document assigned
- Team chooses a document coordinator
  - Person who keeps the team on task and on time, *not* doing all the writing work!

Stage 1: Planning – cont'd

- Strategies to help the team work better
  - Keep all discussions objective
  - Record your team's discussion
  - Refer to this record throughout the document development process
  - Analyze the audience for your report, the situation your project addresses
  - Seek opinions on your plan from outside your team

Stage 2: Drafting

- Choose a drafting plan
  - Write individually but...
  - Remain aware of team's plan for the document and team writing characteristics (format, style, tone)
- Share drafts throughout the composing process (rather than wait until the end)
- Keep a record of discussions

Stage 2: Drafting – cont'd

- Can use Microsoft reviewing tools (e.g., Track Changes) or Webpage workspaces
- Schedule team meetings that address writing issues, not just technical issues

Stage 3: Revising

- Revise the document first by bringing the team and parts together
- Revise as a team, don't leave duties to coordinator
- Revise writing that does not fit the team's voice
- Revise or remove sections that do not address the team's objectives in writing the document

Stage 3: Revising – cont'd

- Check all sections for style consistency, accuracy, ethics, format, organization
- Check the document against the team record
- Team strategies
    - Be objective, not personal
    - Accept criticism gracefully
    - Keep discussions friendly
    - Don't be afraid to disagree
    - Remember, people get attached to their writing

Stage 4: Editing

- A step distinct from revising
    - At this point, all the technical details have been checked for accuracy
    - You have neither overstated your case nor neglected important content
- Edit for format and standard usage
- Check a writing handbook to answer questions
    - Use our "A Short Guide to Technical Writing"

Stage 4: Editing – cont'd

- Check and double-check for inconsistencies
  - Margins
  - Typeface
  - Documentation
  - Headings

Some Comments About How You Will be Graded

- Procedures for grading will depend on whether the report is an individual or team effort.
- Group work will involve peer evaluations to determine your individual contributions.

Comments on Grading – cont'd

- Peer ratings will be based on a list of Attributes of Good Team Citizenship
- Ratings should reflect
    - Level of participation
    - Effort
    - Sense of responsibility to team goals
- Ratings should *NOT* reflect a member's academic ability

Attributes of Good Team Citizenship

- Attends scheduled meetings
- Contributes to discussions
- Communicates clearly and with civility
- Listens effectively
- Accepts criticism gracefully
- Completes tasks fully and on time

Examples of Peer Ratings

- **Excellent**
  - Consistently went above and beyond; tutored teammates, carried more than their fair share of the load
- **Very Good**
  - Consistently did what they were supposed to do, very well prepared and cooperative
- **Satisfactory**
  - Usually did what he or she was supposed to do, acceptably well-prepared and cooperative
- **Ordinary**
  - Often did what they were supposed to do, minimally well-prepared and cooperative

Peer Ratings – cont'd

- **Marginal**
  - Sometimes failed to show up or complete tasks, rarely prepared
- **Deficient**
  - Often failed to show up or complete tasks, rarely prepared
- **Unsatisfactory**
  - Consistently failed to show up or complete tasks, unprepared
- **Superficial**
  - Practically no participation
- **No Show**
  - No participation at all