COLLABORATIVE WRITING & GIVING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK
Research Orientation Workshop for Humanities Center Student Research Assistantships
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COLLABORATIVE WRITING
1. Sketch out a rough draft of a visual representation of your own actual writing process (how do you get from a prompt/assignment to a finished draft?): use stick figures, bubbles, boxes, circles, arrows, words, whatever.
2. What do your pictures look like?
3. What seem to be the main components of the generic “writing process”?
4. What happens when two people with very different writing processes collaborate on a piece of writing?
5. With a partner, make a list of the things that have made for unsatisfying group or “partnered” writing in your experience. What has gone wrong? What can go wrong?
6. With your partner, make a list of what to do to avoid the problems/issues in your list above.

WHERE I THINK COLLAB. WRITING PROJECTS GO HAYWIRE: people forget to focus on the process and instead focus only on the product … successful collaborative writing hinges on the “getting there” (it’s the journey, not [just] the destination)

Collaborative writing involves:
- establishing a goal of the collaborative effort (this may be provided by your professor!)
- identifying writing tasks
- dividing those writing tasks among group members
- tracking ideas
- defining rules for managing your document(s)
- managing disagreements and conflict…and planning for those disagreements and conflicts

Writing, just like research, is recursive. You need to plan for this when working with a partner or group.

Satisfaction in partner or group writing requires that you negotiate these seven things:
1. articulating and sharing goals
2. being open and mutually respecting each other’s contributions
3. deciding on the control each writer has over the text (rough and final drafts)
4. deciding how to respond to others who modify the text (rough and final drafts)
5. deciding how credit (directly or indirectly) is acknowledged
6. agreeing on a procedure for managing conflicts and resolving disputes
7. determining the number and types of (bureaucratic) constraints that should be imposed on the authors--deadlines, technical/legal requirements, etc.

What concrete things can you and your partner(s) do to ensure a high level of satisfaction?
DIVIDING UP THE WORK: three coordination patterns, each with advantages and disadvantages:

- **Parallel:** the writing task is divided into sub-tasks that are assigned to each group member. These tasks can be completed concurrently.
- **Sequential:** dividing the writing task in such a way that the first part of the task must be completed before any other portions of the task.
- **Reciprocal:** group members work together—simultaneously—on the writing task.

SEVEN ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERNS identified by Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford:

1. the team plans and outlines the task, then each writer prepares his/her part and the group compiles the individual parts, and revises the whole document as needed;
2. the team plans and outlines the writing task, then one member prepares a draft, the team edits and revises the draft;
3. one member of the team plans and writes a draft, the group revises the draft;
4. one person plans and writes the draft, then one or more members revises the draft without consulting the original authors;
5. the group plans and writes the draft, one or more members revise the draft without consulting the original authors;
6. one person assigns the tasks, each member completes the individual task, one person compiles and revises the document;
7. one dictates, another transcribes and edits.

GIVING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK ON THE WRITING OF OTHERS

Discuss with a partner
- What are three things that characterize effective feedback on a piece of writing, in your experience?

Editing vs. feedback
- editing (esp. at the proofreading level) is about correcting errors
- feedback is about suggestions and guidance—it’s more formative/developmental

Before giving feedback, consider
- where the text is in the process (your comments on an early rough draft will focus on elements that you won’t focus on in the almost-final draft)
- what kind of end product you’re aiming for (collaborators should agree on this before any writing takes place)

Together, develop a brief question guide for giving feedback
- for example: “Where do we need to elaborate or explain something better?”
- for example: “Where do we need more background or research support?”
- for example: “What’s missing? What’s not as clear as it could be to the audience we’re aiming for?”
- for example: “Is there a way to reshape the text to make it clearer/more persuasive/more interesting?”