

Writing Groups

DIFFERENT TYPES FOR
DIFFERENT NEEDS FOR
DIFFERENT WRITERS



University of New Hampshire
Connors Writing Center

Overview of different writing groups

❖ **Accountability Groups**

❖ **“Write-In” Groups**

❖ **Feedback/Workshop Groups**



Accountability Groups

- ❖ Low time commitment
- ❖ Participants meet weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly, depending on needs of the group
- ❖ Each meeting includes setting goals, discussing progress on the previous week's goals, sharing any struggles or strategies for making those goals achievable.
- ❖ Can be synchronous or asynchronous

“Write-In” Groups

- ❖ Otherwise known as “shut up and write” sessions
- ❖ Participants come together (virtually or in person) to write/work together at the same time and share the energy of getting things done simultaneously
- ❖ No commitment to share the work, just positive energy, knowing that others are working toward their goals
- ❖ Participants might include accountability or goal setting at the beginning and/or end of each session

Feedback/Workshop Groups

- ❖ Participants commit to reading each others' work and providing feedback and suggestions to the writer on how to move forward and revise their work-in-progress
- ❖ Options include focusing on one person's work each week, or possibly doing a round-robin style of sharing and commenting every week on everyone's work (this is usually only possible for sessions that commit to a longer amount of time - 2 hour blocks, for instance)
- ❖ The group decides if writing will be shared ahead of time for reading in advance (and how much) or if the group decides to read the work on the spot (cold reading) with real-time reader responses to the work

Setting up your group

- ❖ **Setting Goals and Ground Rules**
- ❖ **Building Community**
- ❖ **Offering Feedback on Writing-In-Progress (if applicable to your group type)**
- ❖ **Keeping Each Other Accountable**

Setting Goals and Ground Rules

- ❖ Decide on the group's purpose/mission.
- ❖ Set group and individual goals to guide your time together.
- ❖ Determine a meeting place.
- ❖ Set a meeting schedule. How often will you meet? (Weekly? Bi-weekly? Monthly?) What days and for how long? If your group will be offering feedback on each other's writing, decide who will present their work for each meeting and the number of days in advance that the writer will need to send his/her writing to group members before the meeting.
- ❖ Create an email list to for sending reminders, updates, and distributing drafts or feedback.
- ❖ Assign specific jobs. Who will reserve the meeting place (if necessary)? Who will send out group email reminders? Who will facilitate the meeting, keeping time and making sure that members stay on task?
- ❖ If group members will be reviewing each other's work, set a page limit (e.g. five pages, ten pages, one chapter of the dissertation).

Building Community

- ❖ Commit to the group. When people miss meetings or don't do the required work, it shakes the group's confidence that goals will be reached. Group members need to trust that everyone will fully commit and do what they say they will do.
- ❖ Hold each other accountable for the commitments you make. Don't accept excuses for not writing, not reading work, or skipping meetings.
- ❖ Avoid prefacing group submissions or participation with apologies or comments about your writing's quality. Everyone's in the same boat—working on their writing. Don't be embarrassed by your drafts or attempts. While you should definitely be producing, don't apologize for what you see as flaws in your attempts.
- ❖ Cultivate an atmosphere of risk taking. Writing groups can be an excellent way to try out new ideas on an audience. Risk taking in writing helps generate new ideas, so encourage each other to try out new things. View the group as an idea lab rather than as a group of critical editors.
- ❖ Consider setting aside time to socialize, share food, and talk more generally about works-in-progress and grad student life. While you'll want the group to stay focused on achieving goals, supporting each other as fellow grad students will help you support each other as writers.
- ❖ Celebrate your successes. Keep each other updated on ways you've been successful with your writing, whether that means finishing a project, positive feedback from an advisor, proposal acceptance—make sure you acknowledge individual and group successes.

Offering Feedback

- ❖ Take time before the group meeting to read and respond to the draft. In order to make the meeting time focused on feedback, do the bulk of the reading and response ahead of time. Of course, group members are likely to view the draft differently as they hear other group members respond—and that’s great. But go to the session with ideas ready to go so that the meeting time can be used as efficiently as possible.
- ❖ Feedback requests: When sending your draft to group members, the writer explains where the draft is at and what he/she is trying to accomplish. Then, the writer articulates specific feedback requests. For example, the writer might say, “Please focus on Section 2, which I’m really struggling with right now.” Or, “This week, I’m feeling very discouraged and would benefit from hearing what’s working well in the current draft so that I can focus on leveraging my strengths.”
- ❖ Always pay attention to the writer’s stage in the writing process: If the writer is at earlier stages of the writing process, focusing on bigger-picture aspects of drafts (like argument, development of ideas, and organization) is typically more helpful than narrowing in on grammar or sentence-level issues. Having a group of people respond to how the draft works conceptually can help the writer reconsider many aspects of the draft and will likely produce more ideas for revision.

Offering Feedback (continued)

- ❖ Affirm, question, consider: For this feedback style, the group spends a designated period of times offering affirmations of the draft, then questions about the draft, and, finally, considerations for revision. Each type of feedback is kept distinct from the others (so, reviewers don't offer questions during the affirmation time). The writer takes notes on the group's response, and is allowed a designated period to ask follow up questions at the end. While it can feel awkward for the writer to have other people discuss his/her work for an extended period of time without taking part in the discussion, sitting back and taking notes allows the writer to understand how readers are encountering their work and lead to a better understanding of how to express the ideas he/she wants to come across.
- ❖ Or, switch up note taking: If your group prefers to have the writer involved in the conversation about the draft, consider rotating the responsibility for note taking, allowing the writer to focus on interacting with the group. The group might also record the feedback session so that the writer can go back and re-listen to the group's comments and discussion of the draft.

Keeping Each Other Accountable

❖ The group can determine ways to help keep each other accountable, with consequences for not meeting goals or deadlines. For example, if someone doesn't accomplish their writing goal between meetings, they might be responsible for bringing a snack for the next meeting. Or, if group members are struggling to show up on time, the last person to arrive could be responsible for bringing the next week's snack. Determine what works best for your group: carrot, stick, or combination of both!

Need Help Getting Started?

- ❖ The UNH Connors Writing Center can help moderate your first session and help you establish your writing group. If you are interested in forming one of these writing groups but aren't sure how to get it off the ground, or simply just want a guiding hand in helping set things up, please contact us at writing.center@unh.edu and we can help!
- ❖ In addition to the UNH Graduate School writing accountability blocks, the Connors Writing Center also hosts weekly accountability sessions for goal-setting. For more information on how to join, email writing.center@unh.edu
- ❖ For other writing resources, don't forget to check out our website at www.unh.edu/writing/resources