

Forming a Writing Accountability Group

*Tips for creating a dissertation, thesis, or large project
writing accountability group*



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10/28/2015, Revised, 09/20/2019

[Hesburgh Libraries](#)

[The Writing Center](#)

[Grad Student Life](#)

[The Graduate School](#)

Introduction

A writing accountability group is one way to extend one of the benefits of dissertation camp: You build and sustain a community of people who are doing similar work. An accountability group compels you to stay focused on that work. Many students who complete a dissertation camp experience ask about how to form their own ongoing writing group. This document introduces some ways to do this while creating common goals and practices for the group. Through mutual understanding and agreement, your writing group will have more likelihood of success.

While week-long and day-long dissertation and thesis camps are offered throughout the academic year, they are in no way a prerequisite for establishing your own writing support group. You may choose to have more conversation with the staff who provide these camps to understand the purpose of writing accountability groups and building regular research and writing practice.

Materials

1. Group of persons interested in and committed to making progress on the research and writing associated with a large-scale writing project;
2. A shared vision for what accountability is and a formalized agreement to bind the group together with that accountability.; and Consensus on the tools and activities the group will use to stay connected and report progress to one another.

Procedure

1. Attend an information meeting hosted by the Graduate Student Life Office if you are interested in forming a group. If you already have a group, you are welcome to attend so you can learn more about support opportunities for your small group. If no information meeting is scheduled, please reach out to the authors of this document to arrange one.
2. Identify the type of accountability tools and activities that match group members' workstyle and ability to commit.
3. Discuss openly your personal working style, communication style, and concept of what "on time" means in relation to a commitment. Considerations may include the following questions:
 - a. *How far in advance is notice needed for canceling participation in a regularly scheduled meeting time?*
 - b. *What are the expectations for attendance at the meetings?*
4. Identify potential group members at the hosted meeting or in your other meetings of writing friends. It is not necessary that you are in the same field as long as you all have similar goals and ability to keep your agreed-upon schedules and reporting processes.
5. Identify the best location for your group meeting.
6. Meet together at an agreed-upon time to create an agreement. Consider and address the following questions:
 - a. How often will you meet as a group?
 - b. What days of the week and times of day will you meet as a group? For how long will you meet?
 - c. Is a virtual meeting, i.e., reporting by email or another online resource, adequate in lieu of a face-to-face meeting? How many times can a group member meet virtually in place of a face-to-face meeting and remain an active member of the writing group?
 - d. What activities will the group perform together?
 - i. Writing silently, together?
 - ii. Reporting briefly on goals and achievements?
 - iii. Setting goals and reporting on the goals achieved?
 - iv. Exchanging written work to read for context, clarity, copy editing, etc.?
 - v. Exchanging tips on time management, productivity, etc.?
 - vi. Meeting socially as well as to complete work?
 - vii. Will food and drink be allowed at the workspace?
 - e. Are you planning to seek support from the Graduate Student Life Office? Who will be responsible for compiling a progress report for ongoing support? The enrollment for support is rolling with no deadlines. See details below.
 - f. Scheduled check-ins will occur. Be prepared to report on progress in a paragraph.

Now that you have some basic information, it's time to workshop your own answers. See the "Writing Group Ground Rules Agreement," Appendix 1.

Examples of Writing Accountability Groups

Group Type	Description
Formal Groups	<p>Joe Massucci's "15 Tips for Successful Writing Groups" provides an overview of considerations for group formation. It includes everything from writing level or stage to number of people in group. Quick read.</p> <p>http://massucci.com/blog/1211-writinggroups</p>
Online Groups	<p>The National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity offers a 14-day writing challenge at various times throughout the calendar year. The Challenge offers peer group formation through third party service. These challenges are available through our institutional membership.</p> <p>http://www.facultydiversity.org/</p>
Process Oriented Groups	<p>"Don't Go It Alone" author Joli Jensen provides guidelines for finding your own way to be productive among your peers through writing groups.</p> <p>https://chroniclevitae.com/news/955-don-t-go-it-alone</p>
Online Discussion Forums	<p>"On Scholarly Writing" is an online column for <i>Chronicle Vitae</i>. Its associated discussion forum is a place where you can contribute or seek assistance with nearly 1,500 others in the same boat as you.</p> <p>https://chroniclevitae.com/groups/on-writing</p>

Graduate Student Life Director's Office Support

Once you have formed a group, established your ground rules, and scheduled your writing accountability group program, you can apply for support for your group through the Graduate Student Life Office. You will need to register using the online form to provide information on the group members and meeting plans: <https://gradconnect.nd.edu/register/writing-groups>

Each member of the group is eligible for up to \$5 per meeting for up to two meetings per month. Funds are available through reimbursement in travelND. Select MaryBeck¹ (mbeck1@nd.edu) as the approver. It is up to the group to decide if you want to submit receipts individually have one person be the designated spender, or you can take turns buying and getting reimbursed. Use the following information in the report header of the reimbursement request:

- **Request Name:** Writing Support Group Meeting
- **Business Purpose:** Student Programming
- **Fund:** (Mimi Beck, Program Director of Graduate Student Life, will send the FOAPAL once you submit your group agreement form)
- **Organization:**
- **Program:**
- When adding the expense, indicate the type as "Food-Office/Dept (72191)"

If you need help or training on how to use travelND, email Mimi Beck at mbeck1@nd.edu.

University Writing Center Writing Consultations

The University Writing Center offers writing consultations for graduate students. You are welcome to use their resources to schedule consultations individually. As part of a writing group, you may be inclined to share what you have learned through your consultation with others in your group. You may choose to make a periodic consultation part of your group requirements, as often consultants can help move writers past blocks or get them through restructuring chapters or paragraphs that just aren't working as smoothly as they might.

¹ Mimi Beck is listed as "Mary Beck (mbeck1@nd.edu) in the Concur / NDTravel system.

Examples of Guiding Questions for Face-to-Face or Online Writing Groups

Some formal opportunities can provide the framework needed to begin a local writing group. The 14 Day Challenge sponsored by the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity is an example of a formal writing group opportunity at the national level. The University is an institutional member of this group and graduate students at the University can create a personal account. Here's what the framework looked like for the online accountability group²:

1. Starting today and extending through the 14-Day Challenge period, block at least 30 minutes each day this week for your writing time. These 30 minutes can be used to set your goals and wrap up to set your starting point for your next writing session.
2. At the end of your writing time every day (Monday through Friday), go to your online venue and report your progress by reflecting on and responding to five questions. For those of you familiar with keeping a dissertation log, some of these questions may be familiar and you should feel free to add them to your log process as well:
 - a. Total Writing and Research Time
 - b. Biggest Challenge
 - c. Proud of Accomplishing
 - d. Treat
 - e. Tomorrow's Goal
3. Be a good group member. Spend five minutes supporting others in your group. Read at least one other person's update and provide a word of encouragement. "Peer support only works if you support your peers!"³

Conclusion

A writing group will reflect its members: No group is exactly like another. Find what works, use that model, and continue to assess its utility. If you run into roadblocks, reach out to some of your resources such as the Writing Center, Graduate Student Life or the Hesburgh Libraries.

² Rockmore, KerryAnne. 14 Day Writing Challenge. 2012. From participant email. <http://http://www.facultydiversity.org/> Accessed 29 October 2015.

³ Ibid.

Appendix 1 - Writing Accountability Group Ground Rules Formation and Agreement

Successful writing accountability groups discuss their expectations and decide together how they want their group to operate. There are no right answers, but all group members must agree. Record your answers on the Writing Accountability Group Ground Rules Agreement Form.

1. **How often will the group meet, for how long, and where?** Once a week, twice a week, every other week? 60, 90, or 120 minutes? Classroom, library, coffee shop?
2. **How big will the group be?** We suggest four or five members. This provides sufficient diversity but ensures the group does not become unwieldy.
3. **What are the rules for group membership?** Do members need to be in the same department? Similar departments? At a particular stage of the writing process?
4. **What functions will the group have?** Will you write together? Will you exchange drafts of writing? Will you share goals and challenges you face meeting those goals?
5. **What format will you follow at each meeting?** How much time is spent on the writing process, how much time is spent writing, and how much time is spent giving and receiving feedback?
6. **What are the “formal” roles for the group and who will play them?** A facilitator keeps the discussion on task. A convener sends reminders, sets location and calendar, and holds a copy of the Ground Rules. A timekeeper monitors agreed upon time allocations. What positions do you have? Will they rotate?
7. **What kinds of work will the group read (if you read work)?** Loose notes, outlines, rough drafts, polished drafts? Just dissertations/theses/articles, or also cover letters, CVs, conference papers, fellowship applications?
8. **When, how, and how much work will members submit for feedback?** How many days in advance will you exchange drafts? How will you circulate them?
9. **What kinds of feedback is reasonable to expect?** How much time should readers spend? Should they provide written feedback (e.g. comments on drafts) or oral feedback during meetings?
10. **What is the initial commitment?** During the startup phase of every group there is a settling-in period as the group jells. Give it a little time before deciding whether the group is useful. At that time, check in and revisit your ground-rules. It’s OK to change them at that point if the whole group agrees.

Writing Group Ground Rules Agreement

Group Name:

Date:

Participants' Signatures:

How often will the group meet, for how long, and where?	
How big will the group be?	
What are the rules for group membership?	
What functions will the group have?	
What format will you follow at each meeting?	
What are the "formal" roles for the group and who will play them?	
What kinds of work will the group read (if you read work)?	
When, how, and how much work will members submit for feedback?	
What kinds of feedback is reasonable to expect?	
What is the initial commitment?	