



Articles by College of Arts and Letters Faculty

2016

Elbow to Elbow: Collaborative Writing with Colleagues

Keri Franklin

Missouri State Univeristy

Beth Hurst

Missouri State Univeristy

Randall R. Wallace

Missouri State Univeristy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/articles-coal>

Recommended Citation

Franklin, Keri, Beth Hurst, and Randall Wallace. "Elbow to Elbow: Collaborative Writing with Colleagues." *English Journal* 105, no. 4 (2016): 91.

This article or document was made available through BearWorks, the institutional repository of Missouri State University. The work contained in it may be protected by copyright and require permission of the copyright holder for reuse or redistribution.

For more information, please contact [BearWorks@library.missouristate.edu](mailto: BearWorks@library.missouristate.edu).

Continuous Becoming: Moving toward Mastery

Elbow to Elbow: Collaborative Writing with Colleagues

Keri Franklin
Missouri State University
KFranklin@missouristate.edu

Beth Hurst
Missouri State University
BethHurst@missouristate.edu

Randall Wallace
Missouri State University
RandyWallace@missouristate.edu

Submitting an article for publication in a professional journal can be a daunting and humbling prospect. And while sharing authorship can distribute the challenges, writing with others can also be unwieldy and complex. We have engaged in coauthoring for years and have found the collaborative writing process, when implemented in a systematic and organized fashion, to be both enjoyable and productive. The goal of this column is to encourage teachers to write together and share their writing with other teachers in journals such as this one. The collaborative process improves our individual writing and makes the writing process much more enjoyable. As we sit elbow to elbow around a computer, our writing is transformed into a piece whose quality exceeds our original individual contributions.

The revision phase of our collaboration begins when we combine each of our original freewritten rough drafts into one document and then gather at a computer. We read the draft aloud, making changes as we go. While only one person has fingers to the keys, everyone in the room is writing aloud, playing with words and trying different structures. We can see in action what we think E. B. White meant when he said the secret of good writing is rewriting. Through our group rewriting process, we enhance and refine our own composition. We learn about writing and style tips from each other—from learning to use the dash to how to approach the process of responding to editorial feedback. We have enriched our craft as both writers and teachers. After working collaboratively, we often hear each other's voices in our heads when we write alone.

Blending of Voices

According to Rise Axelrod and Charles Cooper, "Collaboration not only draws on the expertise and energy of different people but can also create an outcome that is greater than the sum of its parts" (486). When authors write together, their individual voices are blended, creating what Genny Cramer, Beth Hurst, and

Cindy Wilson referred to as the "fourth voice" (26). To provide a specific example of how the *fourth voice* emerges, we examined the first draft and the last draft of an article we wrote collaboratively to compare the difference between the first voice and the *fourth voice*. In the example below, the first draft is what one individual writer brought to the group. The last draft reveals the revision that resulted from collaboration.

First draft. Writing with each other helps us to learn and remember the difficulties of writing that our students face. And, simply, it makes us better writing teachers.

Last draft. We have found from our own experiences that writing with colleagues helps us learn more about ourselves as writers and about the difficulties our students face when writing, which ultimately makes us better writers and writing teachers.

Steve Zimmerman and Harvey Daniels describe the rewriting stage as "a complex and seemingly solitary moment" (170), yet we have found that it does not have to be. Rewriting can be an enjoyable learning process when done in the company of others. Many teachers do not realize they have the potential to write or publish, yet

improvement in our profession is heavily dependent on the sharing of innovative practices. To encourage others to extend the work they are doing in their classrooms, we offer a system of collaborative writing that can lessen the intimidation some feel when writing for publication. We want to make this process accessible and enjoyable.

Steps for Collaborative Writing for Publication

Once a group of two to four teachers has agreed that they would like to write an article together,

the following steps offer an approach to collaborative writing for publication.

Step 1: Choose a topic of interest and decide the direction of the article.

Step 2: Someone volunteers to review journal calls for manuscripts and the group decides where to submit the manuscript. (For an example, see Figure 1, the Call for Manuscripts for *English Journal*.)

Step 3: Designate a lead or first author responsible for organizing the group, combining the drafts, and submitting the manuscript to

a journal. If the group continues to write together, take turns as lead author.

Step 4: To begin, each person freewrites on the topic to start the writing process. The group decides how much to write for this first draft—anywhere from a paragraph to a page to get started and to see what we already know. These combined freewrites serve as our first, or rough, draft.

Step 5: Each person sends his or her freewrite electronically to the lead author.

Step 6: The lead author takes each of the freewrites and merges them together into one document. This combination of writing becomes Draft #1. We use a Word document, face-to-face meetings, and phone calls with the lead author responsible for permutations. We have also used Google Docs. Whether on the phone or face-to-face, the conversations are important to our writing process.

Step 7: Taking turns reading aloud, the group reads this draft and makes changes together. This becomes Draft #2 where the *fourth voice* emerges. Then the group determines where to go next. Each person chooses a self-initiated assignment to add to the manuscript. These new writings are sent to the lead author according to a schedule set by the group. Self-initiated assignment examples include choosing a section to refine or add new writing to, finding reference articles to support our line of thinking, revisions of certain sections, or revising a works cited page to fit submission requirements such as MLA or APA style.

Step 8: The lead author embeds the new writings and sends the

FIGURE 1. Call for Manuscripts from *English Journal*

Editors: Julie Gorlewski and David Gorlewski

See *EJ* Call for Manuscripts for information on upcoming themed issues. See *EJ* Columns for information on submissions to specific columns.

Submission Guidelines

- Manuscripts should be submitted through the *English Journal* Editorial Manager website at <http://www.editorialmanager.com/ncteej>. Manuscripts should be double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and works cited), with standard margins. Word 2000 or later is preferred. Authors using Macintosh software should save their work as Word for Windows.
- In general, manuscripts for articles should be no more than ten to fifteen double-spaced, typed pages in length (approximately 2,500 to 3,750 words).
- Provide a statement guaranteeing that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.
- Enter a brief (50-word) author biography in the Comments section.
- Also in the Comments section, please be sure to indicate the issue date for which you are submitting (e.g., March 2015 issue).
- Ensure that the manuscript conforms to the NCTE *Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language*. (See address below.)
- Number all pages.
- Use in-text documentation, following the current edition of the *MLA Handbook*. Where applicable, a list of works cited and any other bibliographic information should also follow MLA style.
- **Please make sure that your name and any other identifying information have been removed from your article before you upload it.** Receipt of manuscripts will be acknowledged by email.

English Journal is refereed, and virtually all manuscripts are read by two or more outside reviewers. We will attempt to reach a decision on each article within three months. The decision on pieces submitted in response to a specific call for manuscripts will be made after the call deadline.

Prospective contributors should obtain a copy of the *Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language* from the NCTE website at <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang>.


new draft, now Draft #3, out to all. The group meets again and repeats the cycle of rewriting, rewording, and restructuring with as many drafts as necessary until the manuscript is complete.

Step 9: The lead author submits the manuscript to a journal where it will be reviewed by editors and reviewers.

Step 10: If the manuscript is accepted for publication, celebrate. If the editor asks for a revise and resubmit, celebrate, and then make all of the changes suggested by the reviewers and resubmit it. If it is not accepted, still make all of the changes suggested, and send it to another journal. Keep revising and scanning calls for manuscripts until you find a journal that is the right fit for the article.

Concluding Thoughts

Peter Elbow, a well-known expert in the field of writing, says his goal for students who write collaboratively is “not just to make collaborative writing easier and more inviting, but also more complex and conflicted. And in the end, the more lasting goal may be to get richer thinking and more voices into solo writing as well” (14). In addition to creating a more masterful piece, collaboration invites professional discussion and thought-provoking conversation that also enhances our teaching. The icing on the cake is that, after a collaboratively written piece is published, the writers have others to share in their joy and sense of accomplishment. This goal is realized

for us each time we write together. Rewriting takes time, but when it is time spent in the company of others who share an interest in the topic and have a vested interest in the final version of the text, it is time well and pleasantly spent. 

Works Cited

- Axelrod, Rise, and Charles Cooper. *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*. 9th ed. Boston: Bedford, 2010. Print.
- Cramer, Genny, Beth Hurst, and Cindy Wilson. *Teacher Study Groups for Professional Development*. Bloomington: Phi Delta Kappa, 1996. Print.
- Elbow, Peter. “Using the Collage for Collaborative Writing.” *Composition Studies* 27.1 (1999): 7–14. Print.
- White, E. B. *Writers at Work*. 8th ed. New York: Penguin, 1998. Print.
- Zimmerman, Steve, and Harvey Daniels. *A Community of Writers: Teaching Writing in the Junior and Senior High School*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1988. Print.

Keri Franklin is an associate professor of English at Missouri State University and founding director of the Ozarks Writing Project. She currently oversees assessment of student learning at Missouri State and is a long-time member of NCTE. Keri can be reached at kfranklin@missouristate.edu. **Beth Hurst** is a professor of literacy in the Graduate Literacy Program at Missouri State University where she teaches online graduate reading courses for elementary, middle school, and secondary teachers. She may be reached at bethhurst@missouristate.edu. **Randall Wallace** is a faculty emeritus professor of literacy in the Graduate Literacy Program at Missouri State. He can be reached at randywallace@missouristate.edu.

2016 CEL Convention Call for Proposals

If you'd like to be on the program for the 2016 CEL Convention in Atlanta, answer Program Chair Tracy Recine's call (<http://goo.gl/uxxiLY>). The 2016 CEL Convention will be held in Atlanta, Georgia, November 20–22, with the theme of *Innovative Leadership: Navigating Changes in Literacy Education*. The Conference on English Leadership encourages interactive, participatory presentations. The proposal submission form can be found at <https://goo.gl/za9ur1>. Deadline for proposals is April 15, 2016.