

Editing Documents Collaboratively

Situating Collaborative Editing

Several studies indicate that workplaces have changed dramatically in recent years; these changes often mean that more work is accomplished collaboratively. According to one author, “to meet competitive demands, the hierarchical structure of organizations is flattening and forcing employees to accept multiple job assignments. . . . Out of necessity, collaboration is happening more frequently.” Increasingly, professionals from a variety of backgrounds are required to work with documents that were once solely the responsibility of the organization’s technical writer. The most successful employees today are those who are “sufficiently proficient in their own expertise” but also “skilled enough to work interdependently.”¹

In most medium and large organizations, several people work on a document before it is published. Even in small organizations, more than one person often reviews documents that are distributed to an external audience. These reviewers are not always called editors, but their comments are an important part of creating a quality document. The best technical documents are most often edited collaboratively, with each person focusing on the document in a different way during this document cycling.

Whether one person or several people edit the document, a variety of things must be examined. The editing task is often divided into “levels” that allow writers and editors to more accurately communicate about the editing process. *Technical Communication/4e* discusses the nine levels of edit and divides them into different functions.

In this exercise, you will work in a group of four students to collaboratively edit an information sheet about your campus library. As a group you will decide what type of collaborative relationship will work best for this exercise. After reviewing and editing the document, you will individually prepare a short report about the exercise for your instructor.

¹ Sopensky, Emily. “The Skill and Art of Collaboration.” *Technical Communication* 41.4 (1994): 709-713.

Planning to Edit

Reading. Prior to working on this exercise, you should read Chapter 5 (“Collaboration in Workplace Communication”). Pay particular attention to the section on team projects.

Getting Started. To start, open your word processing software. Copy the document that is attached at the end of this file into a new document by following these steps:

1. Highlight the entire “Succeeding” text below.
2. Go to the “Edit” menu of your word processing software and select “Copy.”

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3. Go to the “File” menu of your word processing software and select “New.”
 4. After the new document opens, go to the “Edit” menu of your word processing software and select “Paste.”
 5. After the text appears in your new document, open the “File” menu of your word processing software again.
 6. Select “Save As” and follow your instructor’s procedure for naming/saving your individual class files.

Now that you have created the new document, you are ready to collaboratively review and edit it.

Note: When you begin creating your document, be sure to save it. As you work, save frequently to make sure you won’t lose your work if the computer or the network should crash.

Generating & Revising a Collaboration Report

In a group of three or four people, edit the document so that it could be distributed from your campus library to incoming students. The edited document should reflect the standards of a professional document. As you work, make notes about your collaborative effort. After the task is completed, you will report your results in a short report to your instructor.

Each person in the group should be responsible for one of the editing functions described below. As a group, you will have to assign these responsibilities and determine the sequence of review and editing that will yield the best document. For this exercise, focus on the following functions:

Content Accuracy. Does the document contain sufficient information to achieve its purpose? Is that information accurate?

Design Accuracy and Consistency. Are repeated elements in the text presented in a similar manner? Are letter and number sequences in order? Are key terms and acronyms used consistently?

Organization. Are there sufficient introductions, transitions, and summaries based on the length of the document? Does the document include appropriate headings to help guide the reader through the text? Will the audience be able to understand the information as it is presented in this document?

Proofreading. Is the document free of grammatical mistakes and typos that might embarrass the company? Does the document demonstrate a commitment to communicating effectively with the reader? Are the language and design of the document clear?

Once you begin, it will become obvious that some tasks take longer than others (a content edit may take more time than a grammar edit). You will also note that some editing tasks must be performed before others. For example, you cannot complete a thorough style edit until all the content revisions are complete. You may decide as a group to

make adjustments to your collaborative relationship, perhaps rotating roles so that you can handle the review more effectively and efficiently. Regardless of how you divide the editing task, you will find that the more people who review the document, the more likely you are to discover potential problems before the document is published.

Follow-up Report. After your group completes its review and editing of the document, write your individual report about your collaborative experience. Using your notes, write a one- to two-page discussion about the nature of your group's collaboration. Focus your discussion on a specific aspect of the collaboration such as how the work was divided, how you resolved conflicts, or how attitudes affected the project. Also note what role collaboration played in the quality of the final document.

Evaluating the Edited Document and the Collaborative Report

During an effective collaborative editing session, your group will make several improvements to the original document. An effective revision has the following elements:

- improved strategies for presenting the information more clearly
- correction of the content errors in the text
- revisions to the style of the document
- adherence to conventions corrections of grammar and mechanics throughout the document
- improvements in the document's consistency

An effective collaborative report has the following elements:

- a focus on a specific aspect of the collaboration such as conflict negotiation, interpersonal benefits, or project planning
 - a description of what happened
 - an explanation of how the collaboration affected the document the group produced
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Succeeding

A myriad of support services are available at the school, some provided by the administration and others sponsored by government funded agencies or nonprofit organizations.

We want to help meet your needs, whether they are academic or personal in nature, so that your experience at college will be invigorating and a challenge.

On—Campus Academic Services

The Library offers a broad array of sophisticated research ideas in a comfortable, friendly environment

With its holdings nationally recognized for strengths in the biology and physical sciences, and technology, the school library collections total more than four million items—including 1.9 million books and bound serials, 2.5M microforms, 125 thousand maps and extensive holdings of manuscripts, films, government pubs, archival and audio-visual materials.

There is still more that makes the Library an invaluable source and a precious stock of information and facts:

1. ACCESS, the Library's online information system provides access to the local on-line catalog [ICATs], which contains records for 80% of the book collection & all catalogued serials, as well as selected indexing and abstracting data bases. Access is accessible on campus through the campus network or Off-campus through the Internet, or by dial-up access from a personal computer with a MODEM and communications software.
2. The library's reference services provide access to more than eight hundred different online databases containing information. Numerous online indexing and abstracting services are also available through computer CD-ROM workstations and through commercial services.
3. Branch facilities within the library system include the Law and Med library and four reading rooms in the field of dentistry, physical sciences, and business.



Fig 1.

4. The Library Media Center is uniquely designed for a wide variety of course-related media materials. Housing fewer than eight multimedia study corrals and 22 audio stations, the center offers both direct play back and remote broadcasting capability.
5. A collection of 2,000 journal titles and other journals offers major emphasis in the arts.
6. The Interlibrary Loan office provides access to a National network of libraries and commercial document suppliers. Loans and photocopy are also sent and received on an international basis. The department is at the back of the library (across from the men's room.). Interlibrary loan processes 10,000 requests and 50,000 lending requests.
7. The Special Collections Dept. rare books and is the home of several national archives.
8. The college Library has a limited number of research studies available for faculty, graduate students and professional & scientific staff. Their intended for research and/or other scholarly activities that require materials, and are normally assigned a semester at a time.

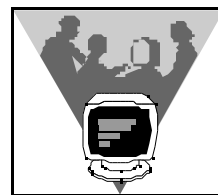


Fig. 2

The YMCA offers programs for kids and adults aimed at the 'elimination' of racism and the empowerment of Women, and Third-World people.

The computation center: services for research and instructional computing as well as networking for the school. Services; consulting support, short courses, and educational discount on computer purchases. Individual access accounts are available on mainframe computers and a network of distributed workstations and related services.

