

**Form a Writing Accountability Group: Some tips for creating a dissertation, thesis or large project writing accountability group**

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# Form a Writing Accountability Group

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



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## Introduction

Creating an accountability group is a way to extend one of the benefits of dissertation camp: You build a community of people around you who are doing the same thing, which compels you to stay focused on your work. Many students who are wrapping up their camp experience ask about how to form their own ongoing writing group. This document seeks to introduce some ways to do this to ensure understanding of the goals and working styles to which your group agrees. Through mutual understanding and agreement, your writing group will have more likelihood of succeeding.

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

## Materials

1. Group of persons interested in and committed to making progress on the research and writing of a large scale writing project.
2. Shared vision for what accountability is and a formalized agreement to bind the group together with that accountability.
3. 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 members of the Graduate School Professional Development Team if you are interested in forming a group. If you already have a group you are welcome to attend, where you can learn more about some support for your small group
2. Identify the type of accountability tools and activities that mesh with your workstyle and ability to commit.
3. Discuss openly your working style, communication style and concept of 'on

time' for a commitment. How far in advance is notice needed for cancelling participation in a regularly scheduled meeting time?

4. Identify potential group members at the meeting or in your other circles 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 week and times of day will you meet as a group? For how long?
  - c. Is a virtual meeting, i.e., reporting by email or other 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 active in 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 work space?
  - 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 an informal paragraph.
  - g. 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	Reference
Formal Groups	Provides an overview of considerations for group formation. Includes everything from writing level or stage to number of people in group. Quick read.	Massucci, Joe. 15 Tips for Successful Writing Groups. <a href="http://massucci.com/blog/1211-writing-groups">http://massucci.com/blog/1211-writing-groups</a>
Online Groups	Peer group formation through third party service. Available periodically through our institutional membership.	14 Day Writing Challenge. National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity. Watch for opportunities: <a href="http://www.facultydiversity.org/">http://www.facultydiversity.org/</a>
Process Oriented Groups	“Don’t Go It Alone” author Joli Jensen provides guidelines for finding your own way to be productive among your peers through writing groups.	<a href="https://chroniclevitae.com/news/955-don-t-go-it-alone">https://chroniclevitae.com/news/955-don-t-go-it-alone</a>
Online Discussion Forums	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 in a nearly 1500 others in the same boat as you.	<a href="https://chroniclevitae.com/groups/on-writing">https://chroniclevitae.com/groups/on-writing</a>

## Graduate Student Life Director 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 an 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 2 meetings per month. Funds are available through reimbursement in travelND, selecting Mimi Beck as the approver. Submit receipts individually, or one person is the designated spender, or you take turns buying and getting reimbursed is up to you. Be sure you use the following information in the report header of the reimbursement request:

- Request Name: Writing Support Group Meeting
- Business Purpose: Student Programming
- Fund: (Mimi 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)"

Be sure to add Mimi Beck as the approver in your profile. If you need help or training on how to use TravelND, just let Mimi Beck know.

## University Writing Center Research Consultations

You are aware by now that the University Writing Center does offer research 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.

## 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 group<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Rockmore, KerryAnne. 14 Day Writing Challenge. 2012. From participant email.

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!"<sup>2</sup>

## What might you really expect from your Writing Accountability Group?

### Conclusion

A writing group will reflect its members: No group is exactly like another. Find what works and 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.

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<http://http://www.facultydiversity.org/> Accessed 29 October 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## Appendix 1 - Writing Group Ground Rules Formation and Agreement

Successful writing 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 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:**

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

<b>What is the initial commitment?</b>	
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