

Individual Writing Versus Group Writing

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Abstract

In this research project, I investigate academic writing approaches by comparing two specific types which are commonplace at the university level. I will study individual writing assignments and their benefits and drawbacks, then compare them to group writing. It was not until I participated in a group writing assignment this quarter that I came to realize that group writing is something I do not prefer, and I would rather write individually. My personal findings include, but are not limited to, writing individually flows better and is more uniform in writing technique and style, whereas writing in my group I felt as if I had to do all of the work. To see how others felt in regard to these two writing styles, I conducted a series of surveys and interviews with UC Davis students to better understand the advantages and disadvantages of each type of writing. I came to the conclusion that regardless of research showcasing that group writing may be better than individual writing, students do not prefer it and would rather work individually. Comparing individual writing to group writing is essential because it provides insights that are helpful to both teachers and students. These findings may help gauge teacher expectations from student assignments, and they are relevant to students because they can help them understand and prepare for each writing type appropriately.

Most people are only used to one method of writing, which is individual writing. This is the most common and frequently referred to as a type of writing, especially in school, when most of the work is done independently. The majority of individuals like to self-regulate their own thoughts and writing process. For instance, as Ibis Alvarez, Anna Espasa and Teresa Guasch state in the article, “The Value of Feedback in Improving Collaborative Writing Assignments in an Online Learning Environment,” “Writing is in itself a task requiring a high level of cognitive competencies, such as the student being able to self-regulate his/her own learning process” (387). Writing is usually self-planned, with the same process of steps the writer typically always follows. As most students have been taught, those steps may include brainstorming, creating an outline, writing a rough draft, and editing a final draft. After years of writing, students have their routine down and it typically works for the average writer. However, this may result in the writer falling into a rut, because while the writer benefits positively by having a writing method that works for them, it is also negative because they do not try new methods to write and improve. The writer is “trapped” in the same bubble constantly and may not realize other methods of writing more efficiently. For example, as Alvarez, Espasa and Guasch state, “One of the objectives of collaborative writing is to promote the exchange of thoughts and ideas with each other...The teaching of writing is founded on the assumption that students learn well by reading and writing with each other, responding to each other’s drafts, negotiating revisions, discussing ideas, sharing perspectives, and finding some level of trust as collaborators in their mutual development” (387). Individual writing hinders certain aspects of writing that other types of writing promotes. Regardless of research showing that group writing is better than individual

writing in those aspects, the research I have conducted, such as the survey where I talked to 11 UC Davis students regarding their experiences with group writing, showcased that students do not like group writing regardless of its advantages. This is important for teachers, because it makes them realize that even though group writing has its advantages, it is not preferred by their students.

There are different types of group writing, ranging from short activities to writing complete assignments. For instance, in high school, many teachers do “Pass-Along” writing activities. This is when the teacher writes the first sentence of the story on the paper, and it then gets passed along by each student as they write the consecutive sentence. This activity promotes creativity and quick thinking by having to analyze the previous sentence someone else wrote and adding another one. Some scholars argue that this type of group writing is an exercise to strengthen individual writing. In accordance, another type of writing that is becoming more and more popular in the academic setting is group writing assignments. For instance, as Eero Sormunen, Mikko Tanni, and Tuulikki Alamettälä write in the article “Students’ Group Work Strategies in Source-Based Writing Assignments,” “Collaboration brings many benefits to the knowledge building process: for example, joint efforts to complete a learning assignment encourages students to discuss the problem in hand from various viewpoints, to activate and share relevant knowledge about the problem, to generate ideas on how to solve the problem, and to search for and negotiate the use of information sources” (1). Taking part in collaborative writing has similar, but more intense benefits to the “Pass-Along” writing assignments, when it is completed for a group projects, not simply for an activity. As the article states, writing in a collaborative manner allows each individual to think deeper and analyze their thoughts further, because not only do they have to write their own thoughts, they have to understand their

counterpart's writing as well. A study, "Collaborative Writing versus Individual Writing: Fluency, Accuracy, Complexity, and Essay Scores" by Jue-Kyoung Pae from the University of Seoul was conducted on 24 students and a total of 106 essays (three collaboratively produced essays and another three individually produced essays of each student), and "The results showed that collaborative writing was better than individual writing in terms of fluency, complexity, and essay score" (121). Collaborative writing allows the strengths of each writer in the group to be seen. For instance, one person may be great at researching and another may be good at collecting the ideas and writing a cohesive paper. As a result, the research shows that the final product with both writers may typically end up being a better piece of work in contrast to each writer doing their work individually. However, even though the research shows that group writing is better, students simply do not like it and do not wish to engage in it.

This quarter I had to write numerous times in a group setting. From planning to the writing and editing, we had to work together as a group. Going into this class I was only familiar with individual writing. Regardless of my bias in the sense that I knew I was going to strongly dislike group writing, I still attempted to go in open minded. However, I still have the same mindset when it comes to group writing, which I simply do not like it. For instance, one main problem I had in my group was that I felt as if I had to "carry the team on my back." I felt as if I was obligated to do the majority of the work, because I did not want to leave my grade to my team members. In fact, for our final research essay our team was docked 10 points, because the student assigned to turn in the assignment turned it in late. As a result, even though all the work I had put in was worthy of an "A" I ended up with a B on that assignment. Regardless of research showing that group writing assignments is better for students in the sense that the final product

may be better, it is still hard for me to leave my grade in the hands of students I do not even know, because I feel as if they do not match my work ethic in order to earn an A.

For this article, I also consulted my own research to understand the viewpoint of students when it comes to group writing versus individual writing. After surveying 11 UC Davis students I realized that their ideology about group writing was similar to my own personal experience. Through the survey, I was able to gain insight and understand the student's perspective regarding individual and group writing. I came to find that 9 out of 11 of the students have written a certain type of group assignment and 8 out of 11 prefer individual writing. Many attributed their need to work independently due to the fact that they either had a bad experience in the past or that they like having their assignments and grades reliant on their own ability, not others, because they said they tend to hold themselves and their grades to a higher standard. It was also stated that students do not prefer group assignments because having too many people writing one paper can get loud and messy. Students also feel as if the final product is less cohesive completed as a group because everyone understands the paper differently and wants to express their own thoughts. I came to learn that a big reason as to why students do not like working in a group is because they prefer working independently, do not necessarily trust their peers with their grades, and think they will be doing the majority of the work. This idea was reiterated in the University of Northern Carolina Chapel Hill's Writer Center, which makes the point that it may be tempting to leave all the work to one person, however, this ends up hurting the group because that one person may not have allocated time correctly to do all the work. The finished assignment may also not be representative of all the group members' final thoughts

Regardless of the research showcasing that group writing is better than individual writing, it was not necessarily surprising to learn that students do not prefer group writing. I had experienced this dislike towards group writing first hand and then this idea was further reiterated in the survey I conducted. The articles written by scholars only looked at the quality of the work but disregarded the student's attitude regarding the group assignment. This is due to the fact that they did not try to understand the student's perspective. However, the research I conducted prioritized the student's viewpoint in accordance to group writing. From the research I conducted I came to realize that not all group writing is "bad," since it does teach valuable lessons such as collaboration and analyzing other students writing. For instance, teachers should still implement smaller group assignments, such as the pass along assignments I discussed previously. This is a low-stakes assignment for students, so they do not focus solely on their grade, but they are learning the skills that group writing provides such as responding to each other's drafts, discussing ideas, and sharing perspectives. I came to learn that the biggest reason students do not prefer group writing is because of the impact it may have on their grade. As a result, I recommend teachers create group writing assignments that teach important aspects without it being weighted towards the student's final grade. This way the students can focus on working with their peers without hating the effect it can have on their grade and teachers can educate their students about specific elements involved with group writing.

Works Cited

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