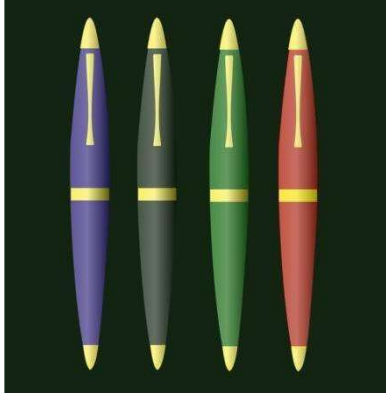*Training often gives people solutions to problems already solved. Collaboration addresses challenges that no one has overcome before.*

Marcia Conner

Module Three: Types of Collaborative Business Writing

Collaborative business writing can cover a wide range of documents and projects, including proposals, memos, letters and even instruction sets. Typically the type of collaborative writing used depends on the type of project at hand and how it will need to be completed. Based on a number of factors, the collaborative team can best determine what type of collaborative writing would give them the best result in the end.

Construction – "Cut and Paste"

As we've said previously, collaborative writing involves combining the many works and tasks of others into one final piece. One form of bringing these parts together is to use cut and paste parallel construction. With this method, often called 'divide and conquer', the team members will either work individually or in groups of 2-3 to completed different parts of the final project. Once each person or group has finished their part, they are turned into a designated editor/assembler (although there can two people assigned to this task). The editor(s), work to compile these separate pieces into one final draft piece. Since this process is done almost solely by the editor, the original authors may not be consulted on how/when/where their contribution is used in the final draft.

Characteristics of cut and paste parallel construction:

- Begin with many different parts
- Combine the employee drafts into formatted final draft
- Typically done by one or two final editors – may not consult with the rest of the group

Parallel Construction – "Puzzle"

Another form of bringing project parts together is to use the 'puzzle' parallel construction method. With this method, sometimes referred to as the Frankenstein method, the team members can work individually or in groups of 2-3 to complete different segments of the final project. In this method, the original author does not necessarily need to complete the whole assignment – sometimes they just need to send in a partially completed piece and let the editor(s) finish the rest. Once each person or group has finished their part, they turn them into a designated editor/assembler. The editor, or editors, will begin to work these segments into a final draft. But in the 'puzzle' part of this construction, the editors will not typically use the entire piece submitted in the final draft. This method allows the editor to take bits and parts of the author's work and piece them with other contributor's work to form one, solid, cohesive draft.

Characteristics of puzzle parallel construction:

- Begin with many different parts
- Team members can submit a finished or partially finished piece
- Various parts, segments and bits are pieced together from different authors
- Typically done by one or two final editors

Sequential Summative Construction

Sequential summative construction is a type of collaboration that involves a team member creating a piece of work and having other team members add to it. It starts with every team member being assigned their share of the project. Once they are all complete, one team member begins by bringing their work forward to be edited or reviewed. Once this piece is reviewed, additional members will one by one add their part onto the previous one. Once the next submission is added, this acknowledges that the previous submission is correct and does not need any corrections/editing. The team goes through each member's submissions until they are all added to the final draft to satisfaction. This method allows for more peer editing and group work than some of the other methods.

Characteristics of sequential summative construction:

- One team member submits a finished or partially finished piece
- Additional team members add onto this piece
- Team members cannot change/alter what has initially been submitted
- The team works together to edit/compile final draft

Integrating Construction

One different method of collaboration is the integrated construction method. This method involves the entire team engaged in a form of discussion, so all members must be present to participate. In integrated construction, the team typically presents with a beginning piece of work. From here, the group discusses and suggests new content to add to it. Through these discussions, the editors (sometimes called scribes) will edit and revise content per the instructions of the group. Since this method involves the entire team at once, it can be difficult to take in all of the discussion at once and use every person's input. This can cause the editor/scribe to make a lot of revisions and corrections while working on the piece. Because this method involves the entire team at one time, instead of allowing them to work independently, it is typically not suited for projects that are large or complicate, or projects that have a quickly approaching deadline.

Characteristics of integrated construction:

- Team members engage in discussion to write project content
- One team member (or small group) create and change content
- Typically involves many revisions
- Not suitable for very large projects/projects with short deadlines

Case Study

Matthew was put in charge of writing a newsletter for the company shareholders in order to let them know what is going on in the different departments. Matthew contacted different representatives from each department and asked them to submit a piece about what's happening in their area. After all of the submissions were gathered, Matthew wasn't sure what would be the best way to put it together. Since he would be the chief editor of the newsletter, he thought the best way to collaborate the different pieces of work would be through cut and paste parallel construction so that all the pieces come together, but still retain their independent voice. Once the piece was finished, Matthew was happy with how the final piece came together and was happy to submit it to the company shareholders.