



By [Gary Klein](#)

At some point in time, all of us have written for school, our jobs, or publication. However, chances are, most of us have done this alone. Admittedly, writing by yourself simplifies the process of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing; but writers do not need to forge this path alone. Writing with others (*aka* coauthoring) has its benefits, but there are challenges as well. This article will briefly discuss some of the benefits and challenges of coauthoring while outlining a way to facilitate collaborative writing and overcome some of these challenges.

Benefits and Challenges of Coauthoring

Writing enables critical and creative thinking, learning, and leader development; but as *From the Green Notebook* previously highlighted, we can also sharpen our ideas and enhance our learning by engaging in discussion with others.^[1] Our connections and network can challenge us intellectually, provide different perspectives, and enhance our learning.^[2] Combining the benefits of writing and our network, coauthors provide

additional ideas, experiences, and perspectives that stimulate discussion and facilitate synthesizing diverse ideas.

Another benefit of coauthoring is the potential to introduce new writers to the process and strengthen one's professional network. This benefit can take the form of coaching aspiring writers in your existing network or growing your network. A personal example of the former was when I coauthored an article with my medical officer while I was a headquarters and headquarters troop commander. An example of the latter was when I reached out to a gentleman that I had started a conversation with in the [Junior Officer Forum](#).^[3] Coauthoring is an outstanding way to broaden your learning, build relationships, and introduce aspiring authors to the writing process.^[4]

There are many advantages to coauthoring, but there are challenges as well. The most obvious challenge is in the mechanics. Coauthors must develop a process to delegate writing responsibilities and then integrate the pieces. A second challenge is developing a consistent narrative. Most writers have a unique writing style, so coauthors must edit the final draft to smooth over differences, or risk distracting readers. Finally, coauthors need to agree upon a timeline and deadlines, while being forthright and understanding when this timeline changes based on competing demands in each authors' lives. Coauthors must address the third challenge on a case-by-case basis, but they can address the first and second challenges by developing a plan for "coauthorship" during prewriting.

A Quick Guide to Coauthoring Articles

There is certainly more than one-way to approach coauthoring, but this is "a way" that I have used in the past. These steps are aligned to the five-step prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing model taught in the Command and General Staff Officer Course.^[5]

Step 1. Determine your topic, audience, and thesis. Chances are, before you decided to

coauthor, you and your coauthors already determined a topic. However, before you begin writing, you should consider your audience and develop a thesis to focus your content and argument. Another early consideration, closely linked to your intended audience, is to determine possible publication venues. Although you do not have to commit to one venue yet, this decision can help steer your style, format, content, and the evidence required.

[Prewriting]

Step 2. Brainstorm supporting evidence, arrange it into an outline with distinct sections, and delegate the responsibility for writing each section. This step often happens simultaneously with the first step, since determining the supporting evidence and content of the paper helps develop the thesis. [Prewriting]

Step 3. Designate an editor to synthesize the separate sections as authors complete them. To help with expectation management, the authors may elect to designate the editor or one of the other authors as the one who makes the final changes. [Prewriting]

Step 4. Finally, once the authors are ready to write, one of the authors may write an introduction first. This step is optional, but it can help frame the rest of the paper. This “lead author” and the editor can be – but does not have to be – the same person. [Drafting]

Step 5. Coauthors write their respective sections. [Drafting]

Step 6. The editor cuts and pastes the pieces together. [Drafting]

Step 7. Once the editor splices the sections together, the lead author, editor, or another writer drafts the paper’s conclusion. [Drafting]

Step 8. Once the initial draft is complete, the editor begins revising to ensure a consistent narrative. These revisions include massaging transitions between sections and identifying and working on any perceived inconsistencies in style or context. Editors may fix the

inconsistencies themselves, or they may share comments or recommendations with that section's author to discuss how to fix it. [Revising]

Step 9. Once the first draft is complete, the editor should share it with the rest of the authors to enable them to discuss any differences of opinion and come to an agreement on the content. [Revising]

Step 10. Once the coauthors have agreed upon the content, the editor should complete the final draft by examining and correcting the manuscript for grammar, word usage, and spelling. [Editing]

Step 11. Finally, if the authors have not already done so, they must determine where to submit the manuscript for publication, and then submit it. [Publishing]

Tools to Enable Coauthoring

Microsoft Word tracked changes and comments, or *Google Docs* suggestions and comments, are helpful during revising and editing to share ideas and recommendations between authors and the editor.

Google Docs and *Microsoft OneDrive* allow authors to write and edit the same document simultaneously. Using one of these tools can facilitate sharing and avoiding version control issues. However, chances are, you will have to download and convert it to Microsoft Word for submission, so check your document after you have downloaded it because I have seen changes during this conversion.

Coauthoring has clear benefits, as well as challenges. Authors should be aware of these to maximize the benefits while mitigating the challenges. This article has outlined a way to facilitate collaborative writing and overcome these challenges. I hope this outline helps authors navigate the process and take advantage of the adage that “two heads are better

than one.”

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[1] Joe Byerly, “The Power of Our Connections,” *From the Green Notebook*, April 9, 2014, accessed February 24, 2018, <https://fromthegreennotebook.com/2014/04/09/the-power-of-our-connections/>; Desirae Gieseman, “Effective Writing for Army Leaders: The Army Writing Standard Redefined,” *Military Review* (October 2015): 106-118; Trent J. Lythgoe, “Flight Simulation for the Brain: Why Army Officers Must Write,” *Military Review* (December 2011): 49-56; Jim Stavridis, “Read, Think, Write, and Publish,” *Proceedings* (August 2008): 16-19; Roberta Satow, “Writing as Self Development,” *Psychology Today*, last modified July 18, 2017, accessed January 13, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/life-after-50/201707/writing-self-development>.

[2] Byerly.

[3] The Junior Officer Forums can be found at <https://juniorofficer.army.mil>. Readers may be more familiar with previous versions of these forums called the “Company Command Forum” and “Platoon Leader Forum” or companycommand.com.

[4] Brian K. Payne and Elizabeth Monk-Turner, “Benefits of Writing with Students,” *Academic Exchange Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2005).

[5] US Army Command and General Staff College, *ST 22-2: Leader Communication* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2016).

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