

The cover features five stylized hands, each holding a pen, arranged around the title. The hands are colored purple, red, pink, blue, and yellow. The title is written in a dark purple, serif font. The subtitle is in a smaller, dark purple, sans-serif font. The authors' names are at the bottom in a dark purple, serif font.

# Collaborative Writing Groups for Academic Publishing

The 3C and 4P Way

Sarah Semon, Nicholas Catania,  
Danielle Lane & Jessica Hinton

# **Collaborative Writing Groups for Academic Publishing**

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# **Collaborative Writing Groups for Academic Publishing: The 3C and 4P Way**

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*This book is dedicated to my father, Edward C. Ayers II. I am forever grateful for your advice and humor in all things, especially related to my career. I miss you.*  
~Sarah

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## About the Authors

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# Foreword

Before I embarked on my academic career as a professor in higher education, I had a flourishing career as an author and speaker on all things education-related. When I started my first courses for my doctorate, I had already had more than 26 books published and 100 articles. I was used to receiving accolades about my writing and topped the bestseller list with my first book “Apples & Chalkdust: Inspirational Stories and Encouragement for Teachers.” All of this I accomplished as “sole” author. I did it on my own, in my own head.

Things changed dramatically when I entered my doctoral program and discovered that scholarly writing, often a collaborative effort, required a different skill set, one I did not possess. I met Sarah Semon that very first year of my studies and found myself in the midst of a culture of collaboration in pursuit of scholarship. I worked alongside and in concert with those who were well beyond my own expertise. We had shared goals and a strong sense of commitment to our field. I learned the necessary skills to be a successful and impactful scholar in the field of teacher education.

Since those early days as a scholar, I have had opportunities to continue to learn about myself as a scholar-practitioner. I learned that I had great ideas but not always the “space” in my life and work to execute them. I learned the importance of *commitment* but sometimes struggled with *communication*. I found myself falling back into my old habits of working alone so that I could manage my priorities and passions on my own time in my own way. The tenure struggle is real, and the preference for sole authorship in the promotion and tenure process led me away from collaborative writing and publishing. Until now.

What I appreciate about Collaborative Writing Groups for Academic Publishing: The 3C & 4P Way is its usefulness. It is more a “guide on the side” and not a “sage on the stage” type of book. Although the authors share their own developing and expert experiences, those stories and anecdotes are meant to provide support for the guiding principles. This guide honestly and without apology bridges the theory-to-practice gap of scholarly writing.

This guide is organized around the framing principles of C3P4: Common Focus, Commitments, Communication; Priorities, Plans, Protecting Deadlines, and Positive Reinforcement. Each of these principles is both situated in the literature and evident through the lived experiences of the authors. They provide a perfect frame to capture this collaborative process of scholarly writing and publication.

I see this guide as something scholars can use informally in their own writing groups to keep them on track and engaged. I can also see it used more formally as the foundational resource to guide a professional development course or scholarly writing “bootcamp” part of a university’s Center for Teaching and Learning. Having participated myself in a college-wide scholarly writing boot camp, I know this guide would have better organized that experience.

As someone who is considered “mid-career” faculty at this point, I know how valuable this guide can be for both graduate students and early-career faculty. This guide has given me the opportunity to learn more and recommit my own efforts to collaborate with others who share a common focus.

*Vicki Caruana, PhD*  
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# Preface

Graduate students and early career faculty are experiencing a heavier workload and an increasingly competitive academic publishing landscape. This book will help aspiring writers and scholars establish hyper-productive writing groups while navigating these challenges. Through stories, anecdotes, and connections to academic research, we will discuss the value of collaborative writing groups in navigating the obstacle course of academic publishing. Readers will learn key components of a successful collaborative writing group and how to establish one. We will highlight the pitfalls commonly experienced, including, but not limited to, infrequent meeting schedules, the lack of focus on establishing trusting relationships or alignment on purpose and projects, and the lack of visual accountability tools. We will also include discussion questions useful for those who want to develop a plan as they read the book. Enjoy!

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# Acknowledgments

We want to acknowledge our significant others, families, friends, co-workers, and pets for supporting us during the writing of this book. Thank you for rearranging your schedules way too often and for putting up with our meetings, text messages, and hours spent on our computers. We could not have done it without you!

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Succeeding in academia is a daunting task that surprises new faculty, particularly those who may be the first in their family or community to enter the profession. Novice scholars arrive with different expectations and levels of awareness about the time and effort required for teaching, service, and scholarship. Beyond this, they may be unaware of the increasing workload demands. The ability to reconcile these expectations and demands can impact the decision to stay at an institution or leave academia altogether. Cue the need for a collaborative writing group!

Even experienced writers experience lulls or ruts in their careers. The demands of mentorship, teaching, and life have left writing and publishing by the wayside. Collaborative writing groups may provide the structure and accountability to rejuvenate a waning writing practice. Furthermore, experienced scholars can use collaborative writing groups to support graduate students in their work and teach students productive writing practice.

Graduate students often need more knowledge, background, and context to understand scholarship demands. In coursework, graduate students contend with learning new content and how to write in higher level settings. Busy schedules might include work and assistantships. Graduate students must adjust to learn how to fit it all in. Intense studies and demands combined with a lack of understanding of how to write, what to write, and where to publish can make scholarship seem impossible. So why do it alone? Graduate students need collaborative writing groups just like new and experienced faculty!

### **Orienting Yourself to the Book**

The 3Cs and 4Ps provide a structure for collaborative writing groups to increase writing productivity and quality. After briefly introducing ourselves and the 3Cs and 4Ps, we dive into ideas for publication and scholarship that can be more attainable with the increased productivity fostered by collaborative writing groups. With the purpose and goals of the 3Cs and 4Ps established, we move to an in-depth description of the framework. We include an overview of additional considerations that should be made when implementing the 3Cs and 4Ps to

## 2 Collaborative Writing Groups for Academic Publishing

maintain a productive, collaborative space. A comprehensive collection of no-, low-, and high-tech tools is included to further support the implementation of effective collaborative writing groups. Finally, we end with an overview of handling submission, review, rejection, and revision and maintaining the group's momentum. We use stories from our experience to drive the application of the 3Cs and 4Ps so that you can use our experience to find resonance as you build your own collaborative writing story.

The purpose of this book is to serve as a guide to support anyone in developing a process for utilizing collaborative writing groups as a means for writing productivity. Whether it's writing academic publications, conference proposals, grants, or something else, this book is a tool that will support the development of solid writing practices applicable to various settings and goals. This book contains stories from our firsthand experiences from graduate school through our early careers. We provide multiple perspectives that are unique and complex to point out that there is always more than one way to approach any situation. There are also a few cautionary tales from our experiences, which may help you avoid some of our mistakes or at least not feel alone if they happen in your journey. We implore you to take what you can from these stories and apply them to where you are in your personal and professional life.

### **Finding Yourself as a Writer and as a Collaborative Writer**

Interwoven in this text, our stories highlight the challenges and successes that led to developing the 3Cs and 4Ps collaborative writing framework. Our stories tell our experiences and perspectives, illustrating aspects of our writing journey thus far. We understand that our readers will only connect with some points of our experiences. However, we hope that through our stories, you find points of resonance that allow you to reflect and find your path as a writer. Through our introductions, we invite you to find your story. *Where did you start? Where are you now? What are your goals?* This overview of our early writing experiences tells the beginning of our stories as writers and is our invitation for you to explore where you are and where you hope to go as a writer.

**Nicholas:** *I can remember when I began working in collaborative writing groups (that were not related to doctoral class projects), two things rang true: (1) Imposter syndrome was a legit thing, and I was constantly nervous to say or write the wrong thing and as a result (2) I would often volunteer to do the things I knew I was pretty good at – like pulling relevant literature for the lit review section of the project. Although, at the time, I was hesitant to step up to a more senior position in the group, my colleagues seemed appreciative of my contributions because, in most cases, the last thing they wanted to do was the literature review. Even though I am still pretty early in my career, I have found that*

*my confidence in my research and writing has become stronger. Now, I am far more comfortable taking on whatever roles are needed in the group – a far cry from my early writing days! And honestly, if I can do it, anyone can!*

**Dani:** *As a doctoral student, I took the fast track to graduation. I started my program as a non-degree-seeking student alongside a cohort of students who had already settled into completing their degree. After completing my first semester, I joined the existing cohort and took off. I completed my coursework ahead of my peers and quickly found myself in a silo, preparing to complete my dissertation. In this silo, I took on a pre-doctoral fellowship multiple states away from my cohort. This further removed me from the support I had built in my program. I share these anecdotes as my experience is unique and nuanced. Leaving my program, I had a dissertation and a single lead author publication alongside my dissertation chair. I had the theoretical pedagogy for research but needed to gain experience in research and writing.*

*My CV remained the same as I moved into an Assistant Professor position: a single publication, a dissertation, and a few conference proposals. I had precisely one academic year of reduced coursework load to get my research and publishing ducks in a row. I had multiple false starts when trying to publish my dissertation. I had no additional leads and was spinning my wheels until I realized I couldn't do it alone. I was welcomed into my writing group with my co-authors while simultaneously jumping into research projects at my institution. It took a while for my collaborative efforts to pay off (thank you, academic publishing timelines). Still, when it did, I had a continuous flow of new projects, writing in process, papers under review, and publications in press. Throughout my program of study, I was taught that once I hit the point of a continuous pipeline, I was no longer in the early writing phase of my career. As I make this transition, I am constantly reminded that my trajectory changed for the better when I embraced my collaborative writing group and the principles of writing groups we outline in this text. I could not have done it alone and would encourage you to consider leveraging new and existing relationships to help support your writing goals!*

**Sarah:** *My first collaborative writing group experiences involved helping with conference proposals and mini-grants. Then, I*

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*graduated to help with more extensive federal personnel and leadership preparation grants – mainly organizing, checking references, formatting the documents, and driving the package to the airport post office during Christmas break so it could be postmarked before the deadline. After a while, I was invited to help write sections of the literature review, check for cohesiveness throughout the documents, and ensure alignment with the budget narrative and funding priorities. I also began writing and submitting the Institutional Review Board applications for various grant-related projects. Throughout this, I played a supporting role, and while there were many attempts to begin writing for publication, these rarely panned out (much to my frustration). At the beginning of working in this collaborative writing group, my contributions were all over the place, in the “I will do whatever it takes to get this thing published” way. However, thinking back, I may have been a little too controlling, but it seems to have worked out. Over time, though, I have settled into my role as a very geeky planner and organizer, and I have learned to trust others to take on tasks that I once felt I had to do.*

**Jessica:** *My academic writing experiences started with collaborative writing groups. When I began my doctoral program, Sarah co-led the grant I was on with a cohort of 7 others. Sarah scheduled monthly online meetings where the cohort met to create research projects to complete throughout our program. Within our cohort, we broke into smaller groups based on our research interests. My partner and I met weekly outside of the monthly meetings to review our work and establish deadlines. Due to our inexperience and overload with coursework, things could have been better in my first writing group. We struggled with time management and meeting deadlines. Despite the challenges, my first writing group allowed me to present our results at several conferences. The skills Sarah taught me early in my doctoral program allowed me to have more successful collaborative projects later in my practice. Since my first writing group, I have worked with several other groups to finalize articles, write grants, and have a few projects. My experience with Sarah early in my writing career demonstrates how experienced faculty can utilize the collaborative writing framework in this book to organize and teach doctoral students effective collaborative writing techniques and practices.*

Our stories are not always success stories. Challenging experiences led us to enhance our writing practice and ultimately conceptualize the 3Cs and 4Ps. Some of our challenges stuck with us in not-so-positive ways. These experiences left us with baggage, sometimes making working in groups more difficult. However, through the structure of the 3Cs and 4Ps, we can leverage our strengths to maintain a focused, productive, and collaborative writing group and minimize the impact of our past negative experiences. As you read, please take time to reflect on who you are as a writer and consider who you will be as a member of a collaborative writing group. *What strengths do you bring to a group? What baggage? How can you use your strengths and weaknesses to become a productive group member?* Our stories all started from different places but converged in one spot. Working in collaborative writing groups has enhanced our writing practice, and we hope it enhances yours.

## The Need for Collaborative Writing Groups

**Nicholas:** *So, I landed what seemed like my dream job and was ready to revisit that Google Drive containing 87+ versions of my dissertation to prepare it for publication. It can be daunting to figure out where to publish, but luckily, a colleague had heard about my research topic and had an idea! They recommended what sounded like a perfect fit for my dissertation research, so I spent the time preparing my work to fit the journal's scope. With the excitement level still high, I clicked send on the submission, and then... I waited. And I waited. And I waited some more. For months, I heard nothing and began to second guess whether I had written a viable piece of work. My chair and colleagues reassured me that review timelines were moving a lot slower since COVID-19, so I pushed through, hoping each day I would get a notification that it was accepted. You reach out and are repeatedly promised and given explanations that justify the delays. Months stretch beyond a year. Then, I finally received the editor's decision!*

*That decision was a big ol' rejection. Over the year of waiting, I started a new project related to this piece and expected the publication as evidence of a rationale for my new work. This rejection meant I lost a first-year publication I relied on to support my annual review. The whole idea of becoming an academic quickly came crashing down. Nothing made sense anymore, and imposter syndrome set in. Who am I to think my work is publishable? Why would I ever think my ideas were meaningful? I can't do this... I'm not good enough... What the hell do I do now?*

### *Imposter Syndrome*

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), “the persistent inability to believe that one’s success is deserved or has been legitimately achieved as a result of one’s own efforts or skills (2023),” or imposter syndrome, often runs rampant in these parts of the academy (Imposter syndrome, n, 2018). As authors, we recount our doctoral journey, the constant setbacks, the inferiority complex, the frequent second-guessing of our abilities, and frankly, our pure existence as scholars. We received rejection after rejection as we watched our more senior colleagues have a revolving door of publications, conference presentations, and “all the things” we hoped to achieve as academics.

We each recollect evenings in the shadows, wondering if we had missed our opportunities as baristas, doggy daycare attendants, or food critics. While these alternative paths may not have been the ones we identified then, they were real manifestations of where we thought we might find ourselves if we didn’t rise to the top overnight. We hate to break it to you, but it didn’t happen overnight, and despite the CV lines we now hold, imposter syndrome often creeps in like an “old friend.” When working alone, it is hard to stay the course and keep doing the difficult work of writing and submitting after repeated rejections. The support of respected peers in a collaborative writing group makes these challenges a little more bearable. At least if we don’t belong, we don’t belong together. Our motivation is multiplied by our members. Between us, someone has the confidence to make revisions and submit them again. We may never be able to put our old friend out to pasture, but collaborative writing groups provide a space for peer connection and reassurance.

### **The Need for Functional Collaborative Writing Groups**

In 2005, Patrick Lencioni wrote an engaging leadership fable about a CEO working with a dysfunctional team (Lencioni, 2005). He identified five common problems of ineffective teams. These are a lack of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. These foundational problems lead to some common pitfalls that writers experience below. The 3Cs and 4Ps will help your team proactively address these problems so that your team becomes and remains productive.

### *Infrequent Meeting Schedules*

Regular meeting times sustain the group’s momentum and allow for accountability and feedback, maintaining productivity and improving the work. Finding time is often one of the biggest hurdles to overcome when establishing a collaborative writing group. Finding time to write independently can be challenging enough, but when combined with the hectic schedules that faculty members and students often juggle (Gallardo-Williams et al., 2021), coordinating a common meeting time for a group can be a real challenge. All too often, scholars agree to work on writing an article, book, or grant. However, their efforts may die on the

vine because they cannot establish or stick to meeting times. Most project groups in our experience began with great intentions but fizzled out due to infrequent meeting schedules.

**Sarah:** *I started my new position, and I was excited to be asked to be part of a project with faculty who were more experienced than me. We scheduled our first meeting and had a great session. We refined the topic, organized an outline, and assigned some tasks. When the meeting ended, it was time to put the next date on the calendar. Everyone pulled out their schedules. Everyone was busy, and no one could find a way to make anything work in the next two weeks. We set a date for three weeks later. When we met again, the initial enthusiasm and focus for the project were diluted. Where there was a flurry of ideas in the first meeting, this meeting moved along slowly with a repeat pattern of missed deadlines and lack of follow-through. We recognized we needed to follow up more frequently, so we scheduled another meeting the following week to get traction. In each subsequent meeting, we spent at least 10–15 minutes at the end of each session to identify the next meeting date. We each had to review our commitments to find a time that would not conflict with events or other meetings. About eight months later, we finally got the article into a draft that could be submitted. We managed to submit the article but received a rejection letter saying it needed major revisions. The team needed to submit it elsewhere. We met one more time before the summer and agreed to try to identify a new journal outlet and think of ways to improve the article independently. Once fall began, we struggled to find a good time to meet again. Slowly but surely, the energy and task of completing the revision and resubmission process fell lower and lower on the priority list. When we passed each other in the halls, we would mention how we wanted to get back to the project but how we were all so busy. At some point, the infrequency of the meeting schedule and the scope of the work could not be reconciled, and the project was left behind.*

Regular meeting times allow the group to maintain momentum, set manageable deadlines, and stick to those deadlines. One positive outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic was innovations to improve online learning and meetings. This began making it easy to connect with like-minded faculty and students looking to write (Bryce, 2021). With virtual meeting spaces, collaboration can occur without the commute, which makes squeezing in the shared work time more doable. However, as the scenario in this section illustrates, finding a common time, even in the virtual space, is easier said than done. Meeting times do not have to be long or formal. As with writing, something is better than nothing, and the time dedicated to the collaborative project will add up, even in small increments. In addition to finding a

## **8 Collaborative Writing Groups for Academic Publishing**

common meeting time, it is vital to set aside time for personal writing projects and to provide peers with feedback on their work. Regular meetings with peers can be used for feedback or accountability checks. Still, it is essential to communicate personal commitments to the group and keep time for individual projects.

### ***Isolation and Lack of Focus on Establishing Relationships***

Another challenge to a faculty member's writing ability is the lack of relationships that often exist in academia. It takes time to build relationships, and these interactions nurture that sense of collaboration and teamwork between faculty colleagues (Haviland et al., 2020). A successful writing group requires like-minded people with similar research interests, aligned writing and publishing goals, and similar time commitments. It can be difficult to "find a tribe," which can take time in and of itself. However, it is not uncommon at many institutions, especially larger ones, for many faculty to work through their responsibilities without any communication, visibility, or awareness (Fiore & Koverola, 2022). For example, being in teacher preparation or education programs can require work to be completed in the field, including visiting student teachers in their respective classrooms. Having a role that requires lots of time off campus means less time interacting and building connections with those faculty on campus. This disconnection can create a sense of distance among colleagues who do not spend much time together physically. This lack of communication and isolation can be where the opportunity for building trusting relationships falls short. Overall, the lives and work of faculty and graduate students are busy. It can be a challenge to find the time to connect with others. Although meetings bring departments and committees together, there is often little time for collaboration and developing relationships during that time.

### ***Lack of Focus on Alignment of Purpose and Projects***

New faculty and graduate students must work out what their research agenda will look like. It can feel overwhelming to narrow the scope to find one's path in research when it seems like everyone else is well on their way (Gallardo-Williams et al., 2021). Early career scholars and students may feel compelled to jump and say yes when invited to a project with colleagues out of fear of being shunned for declining. However, it is essential to weigh out every opportunity to be sure it connects to one's research agenda (Schimel, 2022). Committing to a project fully requires an aligned focus and putting forth the best effort and energy. Furthermore, signing up for projects related to one's research agenda allows for the advancement of all projects, even if they are not all getting the most attention.

Moving from one project to the next can often feel like a tug of war, where one's research agenda seems to broaden and narrow like a glob of silly putty. It is ok to test the waters by thinking outside the box. Still, at the end of the day, scholars, especially early career, and emerging scholars should consider how each project fits into their overall portfolio for annual review, mid-term review, or overall body of work. Tenure track faculty and visiting instructors must adhere to many requirements or