

SCENARIO

It had been a day that started badly but ended rather well. You and five of your colleagues at the Rock Hill Power Company were drafting the company's five-year strategic plan. You were plugging the need for a statement concerning ethical behavior on the part of the company, and Charlie Burke kept objecting to your idea. Things were getting kind of hot.

"Look, Charlie," you said, "Companies need to be ethical to stay in business. Remember what happened to. . ."

Charlie cut you off with, "Look, I don't need you to lecture me on the need for ethical behavior, so I wish you would quit pontificating about it."

You were about to really tell him off when Carla broke in. "I thought only popes had the right to pontificate," she said. "Why don't we look at the need for the company to help its customers move toward more environmentally sound heating systems. We need to set realistic goals for that."

The group was pretty well agreed about the goals to be set in that area. You discussed them amiably and, in about thirty minutes, achieved a good draft statement on that topic.

Then Carla said, "About ethics. You know, the National Science Foundation supports an ethics help line on the Net run by the National Institute for Engineering Ethics."

"So?" said Charlie.

"Well," said Carla, "You've made clear your objections to a statement in the strategic plan about ethics. You think it could be perceived as an admission that we haven't been ethical in the past, right?"

"You got it," Charlie said.

"Maybe so," Carla said, "but ethics in engineering has become a really hot topic. People are concerned about it. A statement in our strategic plan about ethics could be perceived as a sign that we are up-to-date and ethically aware, as, indeed, we really are."

"I think Carla's right," Jerry said.

"I suppose we could talk about it," Charlie said.

And the group did talk about it, and in about twenty minutes had worked out an ethics statement that satisfied everyone, even Charlie and you.

Planning documents collaboratively and having group discussions are common experiences in the workplace. As we have just seen, they often lead to tense, even personal arguments. How Carla defused the tension in this situation and moved the group on to a good resolution is explained in this chapter.

chapter 3

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As we point out in Chapter 2, you can write collaboratively as well as individually. Organizations conduct a good deal of their business through group conferences. In a group conference, people gather, usually in a comfortable setting, to share information, ideas, and opinions. Organizations use group conferences for planning, disseminating information, and, most of all, for problem solving. As a problem-solving activity, writing lends itself particularly well to conferencing techniques. In fact, collaborative writing is common in the workplace.¹

In this chapter, we discuss some of the ways that people can collaborate on a piece of writing. We conclude with a brief discussion of group conferencing skills, skills that are useful not only for collaborative writing but for any conference situation you are likely to find yourself in.

People cooperate in many ways in the workplace. One of the ways they cooperate is to share their writing with one another. Someone writing a report may pass it to a coworker and ask for a general comment or perhaps specifically for feedback on the report's style, tone, accuracy, or even grammar.

However, the collaborative writing we discuss in this chapter is more complex than a simple sharing. Rather, it is the working together of a group over an extended period of time to produce a document. In producing the document, the group shares the responsibility for the document, the decision making, and the work. Figure 3-1 shows the major steps of the collaborative process. Collaborative writing can be two people working together, or five or six. Writing groups with more than seven members are likely to be unwieldy. In any case, all the elements of composing—situational analysis, discovery, arrangement, drafting and revising, and editing—generally benefit by having more than one person working on them. Student groups doing collaborative writing in the classroom found that it developed their interpersonal communication skills, aided in the generation of ideas and topics, and lowered the stress of writing.²

There is a downside in that groups sometimes digress and stray from the point of the discussion. Some students in collaborative groups found that they generated more ideas than they could use and that conflicts sometimes slowed the process.³ Therefore, it helps to have some set procedures that guide discussion down the right pathways and yet do not stifle it. To that end, we have provided a planning and revision checklist at the end of this chapter and many others. The checklist provided on the front endpapers of this book combines the checklist from Chapter 2, Composing, with key elements from the checklist that follows this chapter. Following these checklists will help you stay on track. The checklists raise questions about topic, purpose, and audience that will guide either the individual or the group to the answers needed.

PLANNING

The advantage of working in a group is that you are likely to hit on key elements that working alone you might overlook. The collaborative process greatly enhances situational analysis and discovery. Shared information about audience is often more accurate and complete than individual knowledge. By hammering out a purpose statement that satisfies all its members, a group heightens the probability that the purpose statement will be on target.

The flow of ideas in a group situational analysis and in a discovery brainstorming session will come so rapidly that you risk losing some of them. One or two people in the group should serve as recorders to capture the thoughts before they are lost. It helps if the recording is done so that all can see—on a blackboard, a pad on an easel, or a computer screen. During the brainstorming, remember to accept all ideas, no matter how outlandish they may appear. Evaluation and selection will follow.

The group can take one of the more organized approaches to discovery. For instance, if instructions are clearly called for, the group can use the arrangement pattern of instructions to guide discovery. If discovery includes gathering information, working in a group can speed up the process. The group can divide the work to be done, assigning portions of the work according to the expertise of each group member.

When the brainstorming and other discovery techniques are finished, the group must evaluate the results. This is a time when trouble can occur. When everyone is brainstorming, it's fun to listen to the flow. There is a synergy working that helps to produce more ideas than any one individual is likely to develop working alone. When the time comes to evaluate and select ideas, however, some ideas will be rejected, and tension in the group may result. Feelings may be ruffled. Keep the discussion as open but as objective as you can. Where possible, divorce the ideas from the people who offered them.

Evaluate the ideas on their merits—on how well they fit the purpose and the intended audience. Whatever you do, don't attack people for their ideas. Again, someone should keep track of the discussion in a way that the group can follow.

In collaborative writing, a good way of evaluating the ideas and information you are working with is to arrange them into an organizational plan. The act of arranging will highlight those ideas that work, without shining too bright a spotlight on those that don't. A formal outline is not always necessary, but a group usually needs a tighter, more detailed organizational plan than does an individual (see Outlining in Appendix B).

Do not be in a hurry at this stage (or any other stage) to reach agreement. Collaborative groups should not be afraid of argument and disagreement. Objective discussion about such elements as purpose, content, style, and tone are absolutely necessary if all members of the group are to visualize the report in the same way. A failure to get a true consensus on how the report is to meet its purpose and how it should be written can lead to serious difficulties later in the process.

While in the planning stage, a group should take four other steps that can save a lot of hassle and bother later on:

1. Using Chapter 11, Document Design, to help you, make up a style sheet for everyone to follow. Agree on and record such matters as these:
 - Font type and size and spacing for text
 - Line length and margins
 - Highlighting (boldface, italics, and so forth)
 - Placement and style of page numbers
 - Format for headers and footers

- Placement, caption style, and identification (numbers or letters) for figures and tables
- Format for at least three levels of headings, to include font size and type, grammatical structure, capitalization, placement, and spacing (see pages 256–264)
- Format for lists and informal tables [bullets (•), numbers, spacing, indentation, and so forth]
- Documentation for both text and graphics (see Documentation in Appendix B or use the documentation format in some guide, such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*)

When the style sheet is finished, print out copies for everyone in the group. If you take the time to provide examples of such things as headings, your style sheet will be even more useful.

2. Set deadlines for completed work and stick to them. The deadlines should allow ample time for the revising stage and for the delays that seem inevitable in writing projects.
3. Choose a coordinator from among the group. In choosing a coordinator, group members should avoid both passive and dominating personality types. The group should give the coordinator the authority to enforce deadlines, call meetings, and otherwise shepherd the group through the collaborative process. Unless the coordinator abuses his or her authority, the group should give the coordinator full cooperation.
4. Schedule frequent review sessions. In them, group members should offer support and encouragement and check to see if group goals are being met. Such sessions are also useful in identifying any who may be shirking their work and those whose load may be unfair. In either case group members must move to correct the situation, usually by talking out the problem. Workloads can be adjusted and shirkers can be asked to meet their assigned responsibilities.

When the planning is finished, you may want to take one more step.

Collaborative writing, like individual writing, can profit from networking with individuals or groups outside your immediate working group. You may want to seek comments about your content and organizational plan from people with particular knowledge of the subject area. If you're writing in a large organization, it might pay to seek advice from people senior to you who may see political implications your group has overlooked. In writing instructions, you would be wise to discuss your plan with several members of the group to be instructed. Be ready to go back to the drawing board if your networking reveals serious flaws in your plan.

DRAFTING

In the actual drafting of a document, a group can choose one of several possible approaches.

Dividing the Work

For lengthy documents, perhaps the most common drafting procedure is to divide the drafting among the group. Each member of the group takes responsibility for a segment of the organizational plan and writes a draft based on the group plan. It's always possible, even likely, that each writer will alter the plan to some degree. If the alterations are slight enough that they do not cause major problems for group members working on other segments of the plan, such alterations are appropriate. However, if such changes will cause problems for others, the people affected should be consulted.

Allow generous deadlines when you divide the work. Even when a group has agreed on the design features, there will be many stylistic differences in the first drafts. A group that divides the work must be prepared to spend a good deal of time revising and polishing to get a final product in which all the segments fit together smoothly.

Drafting in Collaboration

In a second method of drafting, a group may want to draft the document in collaboration, rather than dividing up the work. Word processing, in particular, makes such close collaboration possible. Two or three people sitting before a keyboard and a screen will find that they can write together. Generally, one person will control the keyboard, but all collaborators can read the screen and provide immediate feedback as changes are made to the document. Although such close collaboration is possible, it is a method seldom used in the workplace, probably because it is time consuming and, therefore, costly. Its use is most often reserved for short, important documents in which the writers must weigh every word and nuance.

One Person Doing the Drafting

The third method of drafting is to have one person draft the entire document. This produces a uniformity of style, but in a classroom the obvious disadvantage is that not everyone will get needed writing experience. An alternative approach is to divide the work but then appoint a lead writer to put the segments together, blending the parts into a stylistic whole. The group may even give the lead writer the authority to make editorial decisions when the group cannot reach agreement on its own. In large organizations you will find all of these methods, or combinations of them, in use.

REVISING AND EDITING

Collaboration works particularly well in revising and editing. People working in a group frequently will see problems in a draft, and solutions to those problems, that a person working alone will not see.

Revising

In revising, concern yourself primarily with content, organization, style, and tone. Be concerned with how well a draft fits purpose and organization. When the group can work together in the same location, everyone should have a copy of the draft, either on paper or on a computer screen. Comments about the draft should be both criterion based and reader based.⁴

Criterion-Based Comments Criterion-based comments measure the draft against some standard. For example, the sentences may violate stylistic standards by being too long or by containing pretentious language. (See Chapter 5, Achieving a Readable Style.) Perhaps in classifying information, the writer has not followed good classification procedures (see Chapter 9, Presenting Information). The group should hold the draft to strict standards of ethics and accuracy. Whatever the problem may be, approach it in a positive manner. Say something like, "The content in this sentence is good. It says what needs to be said, but maybe it would work better if we divided it into two sentences. A sixty-word sentence may be more than our audience can handle."

Reader-Based Comments Reader-based comments are simply your reaction as a reader to what is before you. Compliment the draft whenever you can: "This is good. You really helped me understand this point." Or you can express something that troubles you: "This paragraph has good factual content, but perhaps it could explain the implications of the facts more clearly. At this point, I'm asking, What does it all mean? Can we provide an answer to the 'so-what' question here?"

Word Processing Word processing offers an attractive technique for revising, particularly when geography or conflicting schedules keep group members apart. Each member can do a draft and then via electronic file transfer, send a copy to one or more coauthors. The coauthor can make suggested revisions and send the file back to the original author. It helps if the revisions are distinguished in some way, perhaps through the use of asterisks or brackets. Many word processors include a feature for this very purpose. The original author can react to the changes in a way he or she thinks appropriate. If the collaborators can get together, they can download the revised file and work on the draft side by side. As we point out on pages 44–47, the Internet (or a local area net) can also be used for collaboration.

Comments from Outside the Group As with the organizational plan, you should consider seeking comments on your drafts from people outside the group. People senior to you in your organization can help you to ensure that the tone and content of your work reflect the values and attitudes of the organization.

Problems in the Group Although it is effective, collaborative revision can cause problems in the group. We all get attached to what we write. Criticism of our work can sting as much as adverse comments about our personality or habits. Therefore, all members of the group should be particularly careful in the revising stage. Support other members of the group with compliments whenever possible. Try to begin any discussion by saying something good about a draft. As in discussing the plan, keep comments objective and not personal. Be positive rather than negative. Show how a suggested

change will make the segment you are discussing stronger—for instance, by making it fit audience and purpose better.

If you are the writer whose work is being discussed, be open to criticism. Do not take criticism personally. Be ready to support your position, but also be ready to listen to opposing arguments. Really *listen*. Remember that the group is working toward a common goal—a successful document. You don't have to be a pushover for the opinions of others, but be open enough to recognize when the comments you hear are accurate and valid. If you are convinced that the revision is necessary, make the changes gracefully and move on to the next point. If you react angrily and defensively to criticism, you poison the well. Other group members will feel unable to work with you and may find it necessary to isolate you and work around you. Harmony in a group is important to its success. Debate is appropriate and necessary, but all discussions should be kept as friendly and positive as possible.

Know when to quit revising. As we have said in every preface to every new edition of this book, "All writing is subject to infinite improvement." However, none of us has infinity in which to do our work. When the group agrees that the document satisfies the situation and purpose for which it is being written, it's time to move on to editing.

Editing

Make editing a separate process from revision. In editing, your major concerns are format and standard usage. Editing by a group is more easily accomplished than is revision. Whether a sentence is too long may be debatable. If a subject and verb are not in agreement, that's a fact. Use the Handbook of this text to help you to find and correct errors. Final editing should also include making the format consistent throughout the document. This is a particularly important step when the work of drafting has been divided among the group. Even if the group agrees beforehand about format, inconsistencies will crop up. Be alert for them. All the equal headings should look alike. Margins and spacing should be consistent. Footnotes should all be in the same style, and so forth.

The final product should be seamless. That is, no one should be able to tell where Mary's work leaves off and John's begins. To help you reach such a goal, we provide you with some principles of collaborating.

COLLABORATION IN THE WORKPLACE

The collaboration process we have described in this chapter, or one very much like it, is the one you will probably use in a classroom setting. It is also the one you are likely to use in the workplace when a group voluntarily comes together to produce a piece of work. As such, it is a fairly democratic process. However, in the workplace, collaboration may be assigned by management rather than being a voluntary decision made by members of a group. In such a case the process may be significantly different from what we have described.

In an assigned collaboration, people may be placed in the group because they can provide technical knowledge and assistance the group may need to carry out its

assignment. For example, within a state department of transportation, a group might be assigned to produce an environmental impact statement in preparation for building a new highway. The group might include a wildlife biologist, a civil engineer, a social scientist, and an archaeologist. Furthermore, a professional writer may be assigned to the group to help with the composing process from planning to editing.

Rather than the group's choosing a leader or a coordinator, management may assign someone to be the leader. Good leadership encourages democratic process and collaboration and enables people to do what they do best. However, there are times in the workplace when an assigned leader may act in an arbitrary way—for example, about work assignments and deadlines.

Finally, in the workplace, there is often a prescribed process for reviewing the collaborative results. This process may involve senior executives and people with special knowledge, such as attorneys and accountants. The reviewers may demand changes in the document. The group may have some right of appeal, but, in general, the wishes of the review panel are likely to prevail.

COLLABORATION ON THE INTERNET

One important tool for collaboration in the workplace is the Internet, specifically e-mail, FTP (file transfer protocol), and synchronous discussions. Using the Internet, group members can work together on a project from remote locations. For example, consider the group working to produce the environmental impact statement for the department of transportation. The biologist might be on part-time loan to the project from the department of parks and wildlife. The civil engineer might be located at the highway construction site. The social scientist and archaeologist could be affiliated with two different universities in two different cities. The professional writer might be located at the department of transportation. Without the Internet to bring these five people together, collaboration on the environmental impact statement would be inefficient, impractical, or impossible.

E-Mail

The group just described might initiate collaborative work on their project by creating a distribution list for e-mail. Each member of the group could then mail a message to a common e-mail address, and all the members of the group would receive a copy of the message. That is, instead of mailing several e-mail messages, a group member would only have to mail one—a considerable reduction in time and effort. In addition, all members of the group would know that they were all getting the same message, leading to feelings of equality and trust among the group members.

A group leader could use such a distribution list to mail messages about scheduling, deadlines, funding, or other information that might affect the operations of the group. Group members could also use the list to exchange research findings, ask questions, or discuss issues that arise during the project.

Individual e-mail could also assist in other phases of the group's collaboration. For example, in drafting the environmental impact statement, the professional writer might have specific questions for the civil engineer. In reviewing the writer's draft, the civil engineer might identify several necessary corrections and e-mail the writer only with that information.

For both individual e-mail and its distribution list, the group would want to use e-mail software that allows users to attach files to their e-mail messages. Such software compresses a file, translates it to binary code, and transmits it over the Internet, complete with all original formatting, graphics, and special characters. When the e-mail message is received, the attached file is displayed on the recipient's computer screen, ready to be accessed by appropriate software. If all group members have compatible systems, it's easy to circulate drafts for review, editing, and revision.

For example, the professional writer could e-mail a message to the group's distribution list and attach a draft of the environmental impact statement for members to review. The e-mail message might identify specific passages that the writer would like the reviewers to pay attention to. Or, the writer might list a series of questions about the document for each reviewer to address. The members of the group would receive a copy of the e-mail message and the attached file. Each would review the draft, make corrections, and individually e-mail the writer, attaching the revised document to his or her e-mail message.

FTP Sites

FTP (file transfer protocol) sites allow you to upload files from your computer to a remote computer or to download files from a remote computer to your computer. FTP is thus a potential tool for collaboration because it creates a common electronic work site. That is, instead of continually e-mailing information to the group and attaching a copy of a document to your e-mail message, you can easily upload a copy of a file to the group's designated FTP site and allow each member of the group to download a copy at his or her convenience.

The five people working on the environmental impact study, for example, might house at their FTP site a schedule listing the tasks assigned to each member of the group. As each member completed a designated task, he or she would download a copy of the schedule, note the completion of the task, upload the revised schedule, and discard the previous schedule. Using FTP, the group could also make drafts of documents available for review. Each member of the group could download a copy of the document, make the necessary corrections, and upload the revised version—and all without e-mailing a single message.

Synchronous Discussions

Synchronous discussions can be useful to a group at several points in the collaborative process. Unlike e-mail, synchronous communication is almost simultaneous, with the participants gathered together in real time in a virtual meeting room. Such discussions are often called MUDs (multiple user dimension,

dialogue, domain, or dungeon) or MOOs (multiple user domain object-oriented). A number of sites are available on the Internet for synchronous discussions.

Consider again the group asked to write the environmental impact statement. As soon as this group is assigned to the project, members could meet each other in a synchronous discussion for planning. Group members could introduce themselves, discuss purpose and audience, brainstorm regarding topics to cover, consider guidelines for organization and style, divide the project, and establish a schedule.

Once the project has started, group members might meet periodically in a synchronous discussion to monitor their progress, discuss problems and solutions, and offer each other support. Together they might also compose brief sections of the document that require careful wording or especially sensitive treatment.

They might also use synchronous discussions to conduct a joint review of a draft of the document. That is, instead of each member of the group responding individually to a draft, the entire group would meet at the same time to make corrections and suggestions for revision. Such joint reviews are often helpful, especially if individual reviews yield contradictory suggestions. In a joint review, members have the opportunity to negotiate their differences of opinion and reinforce each other's comments. To arrange a joint review, the group leader could e-mail a message to the group's distribution list, specifying the subject of the synchronous discussion and attaching a copy of the draft for members to examine before the review.

Synchronous discussions are also valuable at the end of a project. A final meeting allows the group to examine its operations, congratulate itself on its successes, identify its mistakes, and evaluate the collaborative experience.

Like all conferences, synchronous discussions require appropriate collaborative behaviors to be successful. Many of the suggestions in the next section, Group Conferences, can be applied in electronic meetings as well as in face-to-face situations. Here are some suggestions that apply more specifically to synchronous discussions:

- **Don't monopolize the conversation.** Gauge the frequency with which other participants are contributing messages and do likewise. Other participants may not type as well as you do or have as much experience with synchronous discussions. In addition, other participants may be experiencing a long transmission lag time. Give your colleagues time to compose and convey their ideas.
- **Pay attention to other contributors, especially those just entering the conversation.** Acknowledge and reply to their messages. Nobody likes to be ignored. New participants often need to be encouraged and will appreciate your consideration and support.
- **Keep your participation interactive by switching often from writing to reading and vice versa.** Keep in mind that the other participants can't see you and so must gauge your involvement in the conversation by the frequency of your messages. If you stop to write long messages or to read for a long period of time, the other participants will wonder why you have disappeared from the conversation. If you write long messages, you will also force the other participants to disappear from the

conversation while they read what you've written. Sooner or later they will start skimming or ignoring your long messages.

GROUP CONFERENCES

Collaborative writing is valuable as a means of writing and learning to write. In a school setting, collaborative writing is doubly valuable because it also gives you experience in face-to-face group conferencing. You will find group conferencing skills necessary in the workplace. Most organizations use the group conference for training, problem solving, and other tasks. In this section we briefly describe good conference behavior and summarize the useful roles conferees can play. You'll find these principles useful in any conference and certainly in collaborative writing.

Conference Behavior

A good group conference is a pleasure to observe. A bad conference distresses conferees and observers alike. In a bad group conference, the climate is defensive. Conferees feel insecure, constantly fearing a personal attack and preparing to defend themselves. The leader of a bad conference can't talk without pontificating; advice is given as though from on high. The group punishes members who deviate from the majority will. As a result, ideas offered are tired and trite. Creative ideas are rejected. People compete for status and control, and they consider the rejection of their ideas a personal insult. They attack those who reject their contributions. Everyone goes on the defensive, and energy that should be focused on the group's task flows needlessly in endless debate. As a rule, the leader ends up dictating the solutions—perhaps what he or she wanted all along.

In a good group conference, the climate is permissive and supportive. Members truly listen to one another. People assert their own ideas, but they do not censure the opinions of others. The general attitude is, "We have a task to do; let's get on with it." Members reward each other with compliments for good ideas and do not reject ideas because they are new and strange. When members do reject an idea, they do it gently with no hint of a personal attack on its originator. People feel free to operate in such a climate. They come forward with more and better ideas. They drop the defensive postures that waste so much energy and instead put the energy into the group's task.

How do members of a group arrive at such a supportive climate? To simplify things, we present a list of **dos** and **don'ts**. Our principles cannot guarantee a good conference, but if they are followed they can help contribute to a successful outcome.

- **Dos**
 - Do be considerate of others. Stimulate people to act rather than pressuring them.
 - Do be loyal to the conference leader without saying yes to everything. Do assert yourself when you have a contribution to make or when you disagree.
- Do support the other members of the group with compliments and friendliness.

- Do be aware that other people have feelings. Remember that conferees with hurt feelings will drag their feet or actively disrupt a conference.
- Do have empathy for the other conferees. See their point of view. Do not assume you know what they are saying or are going to say. Really listen and hear what they are saying.
- Do conclude contributions you make to a group by inviting criticism of them. Detach yourself from your ideas, and see them objectively as you hope others will. Be ready to criticize your own ideas.
- Do understand that communication often breaks down. Do not be shocked when you are misunderstood or when you misunderstand others.
- Do feel free to disagree with the ideas of other group members, but never attack people personally for their ideas.
- Do remember that most ideas that are not obvious seem strange at first, yet they may be the best ideas.

Don'ts

- Don't try to monopolize or dominate a conference. The confident person feels secure and is willing to listen to the ideas of others. Confident people are not afraid to adopt the ideas of others in preference to their own, giving full credit when they do so.
- Don't continually play the expert. You will annoy other conferees with constant advice and criticism based on your expertise.
- Don't pressure people to accept your views.
- Don't make people pay for past mistakes with continuing punishment. Instead, change the situation to prevent future mistakes.
- Don't let personal arguments foul a meeting. Stop arguments before they reach the personal stage by rephrasing them in an objective way.

Perhaps the rule "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" best summarizes all these dos and don'ts. When you speak, you want to be listened to. Listen to others.

Group Roles

You can play many roles in a group conference. Sometimes you bring new ideas before the group and urge their acceptance. Perhaps at other times you serve as information giver and at still others as harmonizer, resolving differences and smoothing ruffled egos. We describe these useful roles that you as a conference leader or member can play. We purposely do not distinguish between leader and member roles. An observer of a well-run conference would have difficulty knowing who the leader is. We divide the roles into two groups: task roles, which move the group toward the accomplishment of its task; and group maintenance roles, which maintain the group in a harmonious working condition.

Task Roles When you play a task role, you help the group accomplish its set task. Some people play one or two of these roles almost exclusively, but most people slide easily in and out of most of them.

- **Initiators** are the idea givers, the starters. They move the group toward its task, perhaps by proposing or defining the task or by suggesting a solution to a problem or a way of arriving at the solution.
- **Information seekers** see where needed facts are sparse or missing. They solicit the group for facts relevant to the task at hand.
- **Information givers** provide data and evidence relevant to the task. They may do so on their own or in response to the information seekers.
- **Opinion seekers** canvass group members for their beliefs and opinions concerning a problem. They might encourage the group to state the value judgments that form the basis for the criteria of a problem solution.
- **Opinion givers** volunteer their beliefs, judgments, and opinions to the group or respond readily to the opinion seekers. They help set the criteria, including ethical criteria, for a problem solution.
- **Clarifiers** act when they see the group is confused about a conferee's contribution. They attempt to clear away the confusion by restating the contribution or by supplying additional relevant information, opinion, or interpretation.
- **Elaborators** further develop the contributions of others. They give examples, analogies, and additional information. They might carry a proposed solution to a problem into the future and speculate about how it would work.
- **Summarizers** draw together the ideas, opinions, and facts of the group into a coherent whole. They may state the criteria that a group has set or the agreed-upon solution to the problem. Often, after a summary, they may call for the group to move on to the next phase of work.

Group Maintenance Roles When you play a group maintenance role, you help to build and maintain the supportive group climate. Some people are so task oriented that they ignore the feelings of others as they push forward to complete the task. Without the proper climate in a group, the members will often fail to complete their tasks.

- **Encouragers** respond warmly to the contributions of others. They express appreciation for ideas and reward conferees by complimenting them. They go out of their way to encourage and reward the reticent members of the group when they do contribute.
- **Feeling expressers** sound out the group for its feelings. They sense when some members of the group are unhappy and get their feelings out in the open. They may do so by expressing the unhappiness as their own and thus encourage the others to come into the discussion.
- **Harmonizers** step between warring members of the group. They smooth ruffled egos and attempt to lift conflicts from the personality level and objectify them. With a neutral digression, they may lead the group away from conflict long enough for tempers to cool, allowing people to see the conflict objectively.
- **Compromisers** voluntarily withdraw their ideas or solutions in order to maintain group harmony. They freely admit error. With such actions, they build a climate in which conferees do not think their status is riding on their every contribution.
- **Gatekeepers** are alert for blocked-out members of the group. They subtly swing the discussion away from the forceful members to the quiet ones and give them a chance to contribute.

PLANNING AND REVISION CHECKLISTS

The following questions are a summary of the key points in this chapter, and they provide a checklist for composing collaboratively. To be most effective, the questions in this checklist should be combined with the checklist questions following Chapter 2, Composing. To help you use the two checklists together, we have combined Chapter 2 questions with the key questions from this list and printed them in the front endpapers of this book.

Planning

- Is the group using appropriate checklists to guide discussion?
- Has the group appointed a recorder to capture the group's ideas during the planning process?
- At the end of the planning process, does the group have an organizational plan sufficiently complete to serve as a basis for evaluation?
- How will the group approach the drafting stage? By dividing the work among different writers? By writing together as a group? By assigning the work to one person?
- Has the group agreed on format elements such as spacing, typography, table and graph design, headings, and documentation?
- Has the group set deadlines for the work to be completed?
- If the group will be using electronic communication, has the group agreed on a site and conventions for exchanging information?
- Should the group appoint a coordinator for the project?
- Are there people you should share your draft with? Supervisors? Peers? Members of the target audience?

Revision

- Are format elements such as headings, margins, spacings, typefaces, and documentation consistent throughout the group's documents?
- Does the group have criteria with which to measure the effectiveness of the draft?
- Is the document accurate and ethical?
- Do people phrase their criticisms in an objective, positive way, avoiding personal and negative comments?
- Are the writers open to criticism of their work?
- Is the climate in the group supportive and permissive? Do members of the group play group maintenance roles as well as task roles, encouraging one another to express opinions?

EXERCISES

1. By following the techniques outlined in this chapter, groups could do most of the writing exercises in this book as collaborative exercises. For a warm-up exercise in working collaboratively, work the following problem:

- Divide into groups of three to five people. Consider each group to be a small consulting firm. An executive in a client company has requested a definition of a technical term used in a document the firm has prepared for that company.
 - The group plans, drafts, revises, and edits an extended definition for the client (see Chapter 9, pages 185–188). Use a memo format (see Letter and Memorandum Format in Appendix B).
2. Following the completion of the memo, the group critiques its own performance. Before beginning the critique, the group must appoint a recorder to summarize the critique.
- How well did the members operate as a group?
 - What methods did the group use to work together to analyze purpose and audience and to discover its material?
 - What technique did the group use to draft its memo?
 - Was the group successful in maintaining harmony while carrying out its task?
 - What trouble spots emerged?
 - What conclusions has the group reached that will help participants in future collaborative efforts?
3. The recorders report to the class the summaries of the groups. Using the summaries as a starting point, the class discusses collaborative writing.
4. Divide into groups of six to seven people. Each group is a consulting firm that deals in Web site design and content. The group has been asked to evaluate a Web site (assigned by the instructor) and write a report to the webmaster that recommends ways to improve the site (see Chapter 16, Recommendation Reports).⁵ Some of the questions the group may wish to consider in the evaluation are the following:
- Does the site seem to have clearly defined objectives?
 - Is the audience for which the site is intended apparent, and will the site suit that audience?
 - Is the site easy to navigate?
 - Is the text readable?
 - Are graphics, videos, and audio portions used appropriately?
 - Are useful links provided?

See Designing a World Wide Web Site in Appendix B; also, the following two Websites will be helpful to you in your evaluation:

- *Yale Style Manual* <http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/manual/index.html>
- *Pointers on How to Create Business Web Sites That Work* <http://www.viacorp.com/pointers.html>

5. Work Exercise 1 without having face-to-face contact within the group. Rather, use electronic means, such as e-mail, FTP sites, Instant Messaging, and synchronous discussion.
6. After working Exercise 5, the group meets to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of collaborating electronically. What can be done to mitigate the disadvantages? Appoint a recorder to summarize the discussion. The recorder reports the summary to the class. Using the summaries as a starting point, the class discusses collaborating electronically.

FIGURE 3-1 • The Collaboration Process