**TIPS FOR A PRODUCTIVE WRITING GROUP**

**KEEP YOUR GROUP AT A MANAGEABLE SIZE, OR FORM SUB-GROUPS**

* For most groups, 3-4 people is an ideal size. With more members, it can be hard to find a good meeting time and give each writer sufficient attention.

**AGREE ON A FORMAT FOR MEETINGS**

Consider these factors:

* How often will you meet?
* Where will you meet?
* When will you meet? For how long?
* Will you always use the same time, location, duration, and frequency of meetings?
* How many writers will receive feedback each meeting?
* How much writing can each person submit, and how often?
* Will members share writing in advance by email (or other electronic means), or will they read one another's work at meetings?
* Will readers give oral comments, written comments, or both?

**COMMUNICATE CLEARLY**

* Writers need to let the group know what kind of feedback is needed for each draft. One way to do this is to attach a written statement that tells what the draft is, what context it is responding to, what stage of revision the writer is at, what feedback (if any) the writer has received from instructors or others, what the writer's top concerns are, what the writer thinks is going well, and what the writer would like readers to comment on (if anything)--plus anything else the writer thinks readers need to know.
* Readers need to respect the writer's request and provide the kind of feedback that is requested, though they may sometimes also add other observations that seem important to them. For example, readers should resist proofreading if the writer has said that a piece is at an early stage and that he/she does not want sentence-level feedback at this time.
* Readers need to help writers use their feedback. Some writers may want to receive feedback in a conversation; others may want written feedback. Often a hybrid form is best--readers can provide a written list of main questions or observations, then discuss their thoughts with the writer at the meeting.
* Writers need to take notes or record meetings so that they will remember feedback. They need to take responsibility for deciding how (and whether) to use each piece of feedback, and they need to remember that group members' comments are intended to be helpful.

**CONSIDER APPOINTING A MODERATOR**

* This could be a rotating position.
* The moderator can help the group stay on task and manage time during meetings.

**MAKE A COMMITMENT TO THE PROCESS**

* Writing groups can fall apart if they are a low priority for members and are constantly being rescheduled or canceled.
* Other common problems include members losing focus on writing goals (groups sometimes turn into "complaining sessions"), becoming frustrated too quickly if a particular meeting is not helpful, or getting into a habit of not being accountable to the group (not submitting work, forgetting to read others' drafts, etc.).
* If conflicts arise, address them directly. Try to find out what each member needs or wants and discuss what the group is able to offer.

**SET PERSONAL GOALS**

* Each writer should periodically review his/her own writing goals; if he/she is not making good progress, it may be helpful to ask the group for suggestions and feedback about the writer's overall progress, not just about a particular draft.
* The group can give very useful feedback, but it cannot substitute for independent work on writing or for regular meetings with advisors, committee members, instructors, etc. Each writer should set his/her own goals about progress and about meetings with faculty; writers can ask the group's advice on these matters.
* Group members can help writers remain accountable by asking for a quick update on each writer's progress during each meeting.
* Members who want more frequent contact could consider agreeing to email one another on certain days, or every day, with a very quick progress report.

**CONSIDER TRYING DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES AT MEETINGS**

* While many meetings will focus on responding to group members' writing, the group can also experiment with learning different writing strategies. For example, writers could agree to try a new brainstorming or proofreading strategy together, or practice using software like EndNote or RefWorks. A variety of strategies are described in the Writing Center's online handouts, at <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/index.html>
* A faculty member or advanced graduate student in your field might be willing to visit the group and talk about particular forms of writing (like dissertations) that you may be working on, or about his/her own writing process and favorite tips.

**Some materials to support writing groups are available on the Writing Center's website, at**

[**http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/WritingGroups/index.html**](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/WritingGroups/index.html)