



Connors Writing Center

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Group Conferences

Before the workshop begins:

Introductions:

Make sure to introduce yourself to every member of the group, and go around to have everyone introduce themselves to you

Assignment:

What is the assignment? What instructions did the professor give them? What stage are they at (have they received feedback yet, is this an early or late draft, etc.)

Background information about the group:

Is there a group leader? (It is effective to have one student take on the role of “group leader,” acting as the assignment coordinator, organizer, and spokesperson. However, it is also important to be sure that the conference does not focus only on this group coordinator – be sure to involve all students!)

Who did which parts? Did they do any collective work? Have they read each other’s sections?

How does the group plan to do revisions/final presentation?

(This is also useful to the group because they may or may not have done some of these planning activities. It might help them think about how to go about revising, about the importance of proof reading/commenting on each other’s work, or the final presentation/compiling final report/project/paper.)

What is the project’s overview/goals/findings/argument?

This is helpful because you will be able 1) to see how much the group has articulated their conclusions/focus and 2) to read more actively to see whether they are effectively presenting their argument/material to the reader.

What are we doing today?

Define the goals for the conference.

Reading the draft:

In a group conference, reading section by section can work well. After you read each section, you might pause, address the author of that section, and discuss what you got from it (the main points/arguments) and see whether that was the goal of the author. Then, continue to the next section. (This serves several purposes. It engages the different group members, sparks discussion if there is repeated material, and often raises questions/points of discussion to return to after you have read the whole draft.)

Common goals for group conferences:

Organization:

Are the sections in the correct order? This may be dictated by the assignment; however, if it is not, the students will need to be sure that the information is presented in the most logical/effective order.

Transitions:

Because different students often write different sections, transitions are often important to focus on.

Presentation: using sub-headings can serve several purposes. They act as transitions, separate the sections, and can prepare the reader for what comes next.

Classic transitional sentences: In certain disciplines, such as business, the author(s) are very present in the essay; their “voices” come through more clearly, openly. Oftentimes, there is a very direct discussion of where the essay is going, what it will explore, how it will explore it, and what it finds. For example, “The first issue to consider is the workplace dynamic...” In this style of writing, transitional sentences can be very direct. “As discussed above, Smith’s poor attitude hindered the group’s productivity. However, the next section will show that his expertise was central to the group’s ability to market their products effectively.”

Consistency:

Because different students have written different sections, they are often concerned about consistency: Are our writings styles similar? Do we all use grammar correctly? Do the different sections cite sources the same way, and do they use sources in a similar way?

It is good to give feedback as to the project’s overall consistency – to point out correct citations, inconsistencies, clarity, consistent use of examples, etc. However, it is also important to encourage students to work on this aspect of their project on their own. You can let them know that the best way to produce a “consistent” project is to read each other’s work, offering each other feedback and helping each other with line-editing and other details. In this scenario, students can read each other’s work, give each other feedback, and then make corrections to their sections as needed. This also helps the students take a more active role in the revision process and in the group endeavor.

On this note, it is also a good idea to have one student be in charge of putting the different sections into a final, complete form. This will assure that the presentation itself is consistent (in terms of font, citations, etc).

Wrap-up:

Restate conference conclusions. Define goals for revision, and where the group will go from here.