



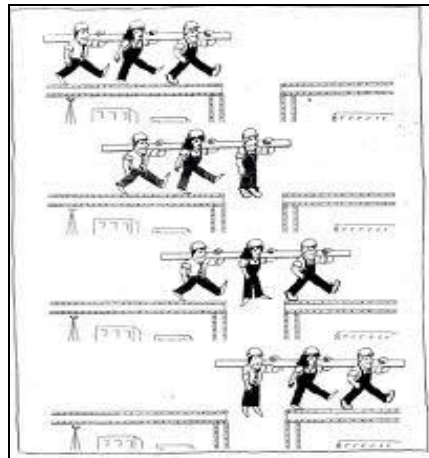
WORKING EFFECTIVELY IN EDITORIAL TEAMS

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Learning how to deal with editorial team decisions is crucial to the life of a professional writer. Learning to cooperate as an editorial team member is vital to the production of any magazine.

The word 'team' derives from the very ancient Proto-Germanic word **taumaz*, meaning literally 'that which pulls together', probably referring to a horse harness or a yoke designed to help horses to pull a plough or a wagon.¹ The Old English word 'team' (which derived from **taumaz*) referred to 'a set of draft animals yoked together'. The modern word 'team' can refer to animals pulling a load, but also refers now to a number of people involved in a joint action, 'pulling together' towards a common goal.

A team is a group, but not all groups are teams. The key distinction is whether the members share a common goal pursued collaboratively. Members of a group may share a number of common features but do not necessarily share a common goal and may well be in competition with each other. A team, on the other hand, not only collaborates but succeeds or fails as a whole: the members of a team share the benefits and costs of success or failure.



Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision, even if that vision is a little blurry at times. Obviously, if you cannot find ways to work together, if you cannot cooperate, if you do not make an effective contribution to the work of your team, your chances of success – and your team's chances of success - are much reduced.

Clearly, the more you put into the work of the team, the more you will get out of it in, not only in terms of learning or passing the module, but in writing and producing your own magazine – in terms of professional experience, skill and expertise. So how do you work cooperatively as part of an editorial team? Here are some basic general guidelines:

¹ In linguistics an asterisk * indicates that a word is conjectured.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Teamwork challenges everyone to deal with varying opinions, styles of expression, difference in working methods and various levels of experience
- Effective joint projects (like your magazine) capitalize on each team member's strengths, with all team members contributing to (and benefiting from) the final result
- As a team member, you may find yourself disagreeing with colleagues or struggling to cooperate with them and their conception of the project. Accept that this is part of the process and that you will not always get what you want
- If your first piece of work is rejected try to understand why – listen carefully to the reasons given by the team - and to improve with the next piece you offer
- The result of effective teamwork is a finished product that meets or even exceeds expectations – in this case, the finished product will be your magazine and your contribution to it.
- Learning to compromise and communicate effectively with the other team members will help you to work productively toward the common goal of producing your work in your magazine
- An effective team member listens to their colleagues.

TWELVE PRACTICAL POINTERS

Point 1

Work together in discussion to identify the outcome goals of the project you're working on. Visualize a successful outcome to the collaborative work – what will the magazine look like and what will it contain? What is its target readership?

Point 2

Together list potential problems you see getting in the way of working effectively together. Brainstorm ways to avoid or overcome these challenges. For example, if the team leader doesn't communicate well, or if you cannot agree who will be the team leader, offer to be the go-between - serve as the secretary / communication / liaison person for the team.

Point 3

Define your role within the team. If you are not the team leader, request that the team establishes specific duties of each person so everybody understands what is expected of them and what they can expect of everybody else.

Point 4

Be sure to keep all team members updated with regular communications on magazine developments, deadlines, developing problems etc.

Point 5

Attend all team meetings and editing sessions. This ensures you understand what is going on with the team and prevents you missing information or missing out on changes to the plan of work.

Point 6

Practice active listening skills whenever you work with your team. Focus on the person speaking, holding your own judgments and opinions until you hear everything they have to say. Ask for clarification when necessary.

Point 7

Take notes during meetings, discussions and editorial sessions. Write in all changes to the time-line or other aspects of the project on your calendar and in your notes.

Point 8

While you do not want to compromise high standards, you do not want to alienate team members. Embrace the team environment as a chance to collaborate and learn from the others in the team. Avoid going into the team situation with a negative attitude about other team members or about working with others. Try not to ask anyone outside your team to resolve the personal clashes, issues of taste, conflicts of choice, or other organisational problems of the editorial team. Find ways to resolve them within the team.

Point 9

Argue with facts and logic rather than with opinions. When disagreements arise within the team, remember: conflict can make the team stronger and generate better ideas - but only if the discussion is clearly focused and does not dissolve into personal aggression. That is the responsibility of every member of the team. If someone is not doing their job tackle this as a team rather than as an individual. As a team, be sure everyone in the team works effectively, contributes fully and meets the publication deadline.

Point 10

At the start of the team's work consider the magazine reports from each member of the team. Listen carefully to what they say. Decide which of the many magazines on offer sounds like it might be a good model for your magazine. Make a short list of possible magazines. Go as a team to the LRC and examine the magazines on the short list. Decide together: will you accept the suggested magazine as a model - if not, what will you do instead?

Point 11

Work as a team on the basic decisions about the range and style of literary material you want in the magazine. Work out an agenda for discussion at each meeting and

agree specific tasks and responsibilities for team members. For example, an agenda might look like this:

**'Mystery Magazine'
Editorial Meeting
AGENDA**

1. The target readership for the magazine
2. Editorial policy
3. Submissions policy
4. Manifesto statement on the magazine's aesthetics
5. The title
6. The front cover
7. Artwork / Design
8. Update Script Log & Decisions
9. Book reviews
10. The House Style Sheet - in both printed and downloadable forms
11. How to show credits and copyright
12. The running order
13. The table of contents
14. The blurb for the back cover
15. Date of next meeting
16. AOB

Point 12

Remember, the quality of your magazine reflects on you: take pride in what you do. Vista M. Kelly has an aphorism which is very useful in this situation: 'Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look what they can do when they stick together.'



FURTHER READING

- Priscilla Richardson, *The Missing Link in Teamwork and in Customer Service: Effective Listening* (London: The Center for Association Leadership, 2001).
- Jane Suchan, *Build Effective Project Teams* (New York / London: Microsoft Office, 2011).