

Advanced Policy Writing: Writing as a Group



NCSG Webinar
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Why Group Writing Matters

As a member of the ICANN community, you may belong to one or many different groups. Each group may deal with vastly different topics in writing, but one element is common: each group is likely to have to write documents together.

There are many positive sides and challenging aspects of writing as a group.

Benefits include:

- Multiple perspectives
- Playing to individual strengths
- Multiple people can work on different sections at the same time
- Develop teamwork and collaborative thinking skills
- Reviewing peer work can allow you to see writing -and the ideas- more objectively

What more positive aspects can you think of?

Stages in the Group Writing Process

Stage 1: Identify and understand the audience

Stage 2: Pre-writing and reaching consensus

Stage 3: Planning and choosing roles

Stage 4: Drafting and capturing consensus

Stage 5: Revising: offering and incorporating feedback

Stage 6: Editing

Stage 7: Assessing and finalizing

Stages in the Group Writing Process

Stage 1: Identify and Understand the Audience

This is the key step in writing individually and as a group. Audiences are described and identified in multiple ways. Typically, there are three key levels:

- Primary audience (decision maker and those who decides or acts)
- Secondary audience (SMEs within the organization)
- Shadow audience (others who may read the material near the organization and beyond)

Note: Writing effectively for the Primary Audience and Secondary Audience will help the Shadow Audience.

For our purposes, the important audiences are:

- ✓ The GNSO Council or ICANN Board
- ✓ Peers and other stakeholders
- ✓ The broader NCSG and unanticipated others

Audiences

Broader NCSG
and
Unanticipated

Stakeholders
and Peers

ICANN
Board or
GNSO
Council

Stages in the Group Writing Process

Stage 2: Pre-writing and reaching consensus

This is one of the most important steps in writing a piece on behalf of a group, because this is the stage where you come to consensus on the overall argument or stance for the group.

In this stage, you will want to have a discussion as a group to share ideas and ensure all members have the opportunity to voice their opinions. It's good practice to establish a facilitator to streamline the process.

Some tips to keep in mind:

- Give all group members a chance to **contribute their ideas**
- Come to **consensus on the overall argument** for the piece of writing (If not possible, make a plan for what is needed to reach consensus (Is additional research or outside expertise needed?))
- Come up with an **outline**

Stages in the Group Writing Process

Stage 3: Planning and Choosing Roles

After you have reached consensus on the group's position and agreed on an outline for the written work, it is time to plan the project, create a timeline, and choose roles.

Some tips to keep in mind:

- Think about what works best for your group
- Decide on **style of collaborative writing** (e.g. One primary writer, with others offering feedback and the writer revising)
- Assign **responsibilities for each stage** of the writing process
- Create a **timeline with smaller deadlines** (Choose significant milestones, and set a few deadlines along the way)
- Decide at which stages group feedback will be welcome
- Decide how often writers working together will meet [if relevant]

Stages in the Group Writing Process

Stage 4: Drafting and Capturing Consensus

This stage will look different for each group, depending on how roles were delegated in Stage 2.

Depending on the writing style you prefer, here are some tips specific to collaborative writing:

- If you are the author for most of the document:
 - Be sure that **you are clear on all aspects of the outline**. You want to capture the consensus of the group, not your own personal views.
 - After you have finished writing, **go back to the outline and confirm** that you have not altered the group's views.
 - If you have altered from the outline, make a note of any significant changes and suggested revisions, as well as any questions you had; when you give your draft to the group, highlight these changes and seek feedback on the questions.

Stages in the Group Writing Process... cont.

- If you are one of multiple authors:
 - Be clear on **how and where your writing fits** into the document overall.
 - Be aware that this can take **considerable time**, and talk about how you can best collaborate and approach the writing task. For instance, it may help if you draft sections before meeting to discuss phrasing.
 - Remember that everyone has a **different writing style**. The most important thing is that your writing is clear and captures the group's position accurately. You can focus on style and flow later.

Stages in the Group Writing Process

Stage 5: Revising

Remember: Writing is only one small step in the writing process.

Revising, re-writing, and editing often take up **much more time** than the writing itself.

Here are some questions to consider when revising:

- Is the argument/position clear?
- Is it presented in a logical order?
- Are there transitions to connect the ideas effectively?
- Does it match the group's original intentions?
- Are the paragraphs well defined?
- Is it easy to understand?
- Can the edits be presented in a respectful manner while preserving the meaning?

Stages in the Group Writing Process

Stage 6: Editing

Once the writing has been revised and the group is in agreement on the structure (organization) and ideas, it is time for editing.

This stage should include checking for the following:

- Typos
- Spelling errors
- Punctuation problems
- Formatting issues
- Grammatical mistakes
- Unclear word choice
- Inconsistencies between US and UK English (ICANN uses US English)
- Sharp contrasts in tone/voice

Stage 7: Finalizing

Check that unconscious changes have not been made to the meaning or structure of a sentence. Be sure to let the whole group review the final document and respond.

Navigating Common Pitfalls

- One person takes over
- Nobody volunteers
- Newcomers feel intimidated by veteran community members
- The group commonly revises documents by leaving an overwhelming number of comments
- The group is experiencing procrastination
- Feedback is unhelpful or entirely negative
- Communications are full of jargon, slang, and overly convoluted language

What other pitfalls can you think of?

How to Avoid Common Pitfalls

- Be a respectful team player
- Stay positive
- See it as a learning opportunity
- Allow plenty of time for revisions
- Have a structured timeline
- Submit drafts before a group meeting to allow others the opportunity to read them over before the meeting and arrive ready for a productive discussion
- Use collaborative writing software
- Recognize individual strengths and weaknesses

Are there other methods you have used to make the writing process flow more smoothly?

Writing Effectively within a Group

In order to communicate effectively **as** a group, it is first important to communicate effectively **within** the group.

Take a moment to consider the following expressions. Which is clearer?

- Go close to the door.
- Go near the door.

- We will not put up with that sort of behavior.
- We do not tolerate that sort of behavior.

- If you lose the registration certificate, we can help to recover it.
- If the registration certificate is lost, it may be recovered

Remember: when in doubt, aim for brevity and simplicity!

Tips to Writing Effectively within a Group

- Things to avoid:
 - Avoid double negatives, unclear pronoun references, uncommon foreign words, unnecessary abbreviations, and contractions.
 - Avoid phrasal verbs.
 - Avoid jargon.
 - Avoid figurative language, idioms, and metaphors that may confuse audiences from other cultures.
 - Avoid sarcasm or humor.
- Things to do:
 - Use simple tenses and direct statements.
 - Keep your writing brief and straightforward.
 - Use the active voice, not the passive voice, so that it is clear who is “acting” in the sentence.
 - Choose simple words and make things easy for your reader.
 - Define abbreviations and acronyms.
 - Use less complex grammatical structures.

Writing Structure

- Keep sentences and paragraphs **short**.
 - Break up text with sub-headings and bullet lists to organize ideas clearly and help the reader to focus.
 - Aim for brevity and simplicity.
 - In general, aim for sentences that are no longer than 25 words.
- Use a **logical structure**.
 - Provide “sign posts” for the reader to show them where you are going. For example, you could start with “There are three important factors...” and then use “One of the factors is...” and “Another factor...”