

How to collaborate

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- Emails with comments are welcome (w.louis@psy.uq.edu.au)
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Collaboration with supervisor vs with peers

- Supervisor: directs you (with or without clarity, effectiveness)
- Peers:
 - No one knows what to do; people have different expectations, often not articulated
 - Good to set out your expectations early to make sure everyone is on the same page.
 - Large group collaborations often fail – diffusion of responsibility etc means nothing occurs...

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A timeline

(about 2 years)

1. Jointly get excited about ideas
2. Agree on design (including research question, method and sample, tentative publication plan)
3. Draft ethics application, info sheet, materials, de-briefing
4. Apply for ethics
5. Collect data
6. Data entry & cleaning
7. Data analysis
8. Write method and results
9. Seek feedback
10. Write full draft
11. Seek feedback
12. Submit manuscript
13. Respond to reviews (may need to collect more data)
14. Resubmit
15. Repeat 13-14 until accepted!

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How to collaborate

- Why it fails:
 - No one takes responsibility
 - One person is too busy
 - No one has the skills
 - Data messy
- Solutions
 - Clear responsibility (who will do what)
 - Be ready to take over after set, agreed time
 - Seek help (mentor(s), or widening authorship team, after group agreement)
 - Collect follow-up data

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A few micro-skills

Timeline

- Use regular Skype meetings to follow up on your research project (e.g., weekly or biweekly or monthly, at a set time)
- It's helpful to end each meeting with clear expectations about what needs to be done next, by when, and by who. Otherwise everyone walks away with a vague sense of progress but nothing necessarily gets done between meetings.
- Agree on the time line ahead of time and communicate about upcoming and missed deadlines to reschedule.
- It takes at least a year, usually – sometimes 2 or 3 years.
- It takes longer with interdisciplinary work when have to learn each others' languages and respect the expertise that all can bring (USLAM problem: "U sound like a moron" when talking across disciplines)

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Authorship

- The order of authors should be agreed ahead of time. In psychology usually it goes by order of contribution.
- The order can change as the draft progresses, but this should only happen by agreement.
- The lead author should be the person who writes the first draft of the intro and discussion. Another person might write the method & results.
- Writing is not democratic - the lead author is more important than the rest. It should usually be the person who cares the most about the project and thinks they have the time and energy to drive.
- It's possible to put in the author note that "the authors contributed equally" but this is rarely true and people still tend to assume the first author is the lead.
- The lead author is the person for whom "the buck stops here". They guide the team to achieve a publication: publication is the end goal. The agreement of authorship should involve a timeline, with an expectation that after that time runs out another person may take over as lead and try to move the project on.
- At an early meeting, each person could communicate what they want to get out of the project, and also an estimate of how much time they feel they have to devote to the project over the next X period. This can help get a sense of who is most invested, and who is most motivated.

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A few micro-skills

Authorship

- Authorship can be given for input at the design / theoretical framework / framing; for analysis and writing; and (more rarely) for help with data collection, e.g., in a multi-country package.
- People differ in their views on what the responsibilities are. It is good to be explicit: e.g., we will all collect data, I will analyse and write the first draft; all will read and provide feedback; I will compile feedback and submit.
- If there are different skill-sets in the team, it's good to be clear early about whose expertise will weigh more on different tasks.
- It is not ok to submit a paper without some authors having seen the draft.
- Increasingly the expectation is that the final version of the paper which is submitted to the journal should be seen by all authors at least a few days before submission, to allow feedback.

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Sending and receiving work

- Ahead of time, the sender communicates when they will be sending the draft and when they would like the feedback
 - "Next week I'll be sending the method and results. Please give me feedback within 2 weeks"
- When you receive word that a draft is coming, set aside time in your diary to turn it around as soon as possible. (e.g., set aside 4 hours on the date the draft is expected to read and reply)

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Sending & receiving work

- The sender repeats the time frame when the draft is sent
 - "Here is the draft method and results. Thanks in advance for your help! Please give me feedback within 2 weeks."
- It is often useful to flag explicitly any issues you'd like addressed. Restrict it to a few key points in the email to retain attention.
 - "draft is currently too long so edits useful"; "not sure that the logic flows well in this"
- The receiver immediately (that minute) sends acknowledgement of receipt, positive feedback of work, and timeframe for return
 - "You are awesome! I look forward to reading this. I will be able to give comments by Friday morning."

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Sending and receiving work

- Feedback is provided in an accepted timeframe, positively framed, and with agreed on authority
 - "Here is my feedback in track changes and comments. Feel free to ignore!" (lower author)
 - "Here is my feedback in track changes and comments. The most important thing is ..." (more senior...)
- The original person then immediately replies with thanks for feedback and a timeframe for the next step.
 - "Great! I'll work through these changes and get back to you in about a month with the full manuscript draft"
- The feedback provider makes a note in their diary to block out time to read the new draft in 1 month

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Missed deadlines

- If a draft deadline is missed, the feedback provider gently prompts the sender
 - "I have a note in my diary to expect the draft today. How is it all going?"
 - The sender reschedules, with sheepish explanation....
- As the writer, do not let things sit for long periods of time. Seek help to solve problems. Discuss issues in the Skype meetings.
- If you are blocked on a specific point, talk it through with a colleague, mentor or in a Skype meeting.
- If you can't get to the writing for months, let someone else have a try if they want to (normally you move down the author list and they become first author).

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Missed deadlines

- As the feedback provider, always turn mss around quickly. Same day or same week is best.
- Clarity about the time frame is more important than speed though – don't avoid responding because you're embarrassed you're slow.
 - "Thanks so much for this! I'm totally swamped right now though and I can't give feedback for four weeks. Is that ok?" (Maybe offer to skip this draft and read the next draft.)
- Long turnarounds should not happen however if you have set aside time in your diary to read the draft, and the other person has sent it to you on time. If it is late or unannounced, it is ok to take weeks/months.

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How much feedback?

- Feedback can often feel like criticism or like you're being tested, when really it is just an extension of the collaboration. Asking for feedback and offering it should be done with the importance of the relationship in mind – be thoughtful, be clear, be respectful.
- If the paper is a mess and you don't know how to solve it quickly, provide short general feedback ("I'm worried about the structure of the intro / the regression analysis") and set up a Skype to discuss.
- In general avoid providing too much feedback in writing. This is often paralyzing.
- People have differences in writing style, but the lead author gets to establish the voice and tone of the ms. Unless you are senior, it is best to avoid extensive re-writing. Less is more.
- If you are a junior lead author and rewritten by a senior, best to feel grateful and accept all track changes. ;)

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Handling confusion and uncertainty

- One thing that could be useful is finding an academic mentor willing to be a sounding board without "owning" the project
- Uncertainty and confusion in general are best discussed in the regular Skype meetings, not in writing (bogs down too much)
- If possible, the lead author should take responsibility for a "captain's call" as well as laying out the alternatives. This generates the most productive conversations, even if the decision gets reversed (you should be open to reversing it).
 - "I'm not sure how to structure the intro. I've thought about X then Y (like this other paper, attached) as well as Y then X (which seems to flow better). I'm leaning towards Y then X. What do you think?"
- If possible, written drafts should be sent out with the chosen alternative already implemented clearly and in full, and draft answers for any questions: uncertainty can be noted in a comment.
 - "Here I've ignored the Nadler studies. Do you think we need to build them in?"
 - "Here I've chosen to use a Bonferroni for all analyses, which means one of our hypothesized follow-up comparisons is ns. Do you think I should use $p < .05$?"¹⁴

Underperforming team members: Writers

- Writing is not about fairness, it is about clear communication and putting words on the page.
- Someone who is not performing as a writer should offer to let another person take their place and should 'move down' the author list.
- Be generous about authorship. If someone is not performing as a team member, I usually would still leave them as an author on the paper if they were involved in the design.

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Underperforming team members: Feedback

- It is ok to send someone an email with the finalised ms "Please give feedback within 4 weeks if you would still like to be involved". The time frame must be realistic however.
- You should secure consent to be dropped explicitly. Double check they received the paper (e.g., with a phone call).
- Another option is to say "Please let us know if you would like to make changes within 2 weeks" and assume no problems if you do not hear from them. But active agreement is better and sometimes required by university or journals.
- They should be able to write back and request a longer time frame, with a good excuse. If they assert their co-authorship, and they want you to wait for their feedback, basically you have to wait for them.
- You may say, "look, what if I take you off this version, and if gets knocked back or there is another revision and you have time to contribute, I will put you back on?" or "What if you skim the discussion for now and we will submit next week; when it comes back for revision you can read that version?"
- Their intellectual contribution still could be acknowledged (e.g., in author note).
- Dropping someone as an author usually means making an enemy and never working with them again, but sometimes this might be worth it.

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A few micro-skills

- Too much negativity is often paralyzing for groups. Try not to raise a criticism without proposing a solution
 - X "This research question isn't clear"
 - Yes: "This research question isn't clear to me: do you mean that we hypothesize that X will lead to Y?"
 - X: "Our sample is too small"
 - Yes: "It would be better if we had more people. Can we brainstorm about whether we can get more?"
- If there's a problem with the data that can't be solved, seek feedback from mentors (ideally) or from reviewers.
- It's not ideal to submit a ms that one or more authors feels is flawed, but it often happens. It is better to fix the problem that the concerned author has flagged.
- If the blithe author is the lead and/or there is too much time pressure, and you submit – the reviewers either will or will not agree. Whomever was right should not say "I told you so".
- Sometimes additional data collection is required, or maybe just sending to a lower journal.

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Disputes

- If someone who is higher in the agreed author list has a different vision than someone who is lower in the agreed author list, this should ideally be resolved by group discussion.
- Collaborators are in a relationship. Like in any relationship, communication and respect are key.
- It is best to defer to the person with the most publication experience in the area. Also: seek feedback from other mentors.
- If the dispute cannot be resolved, the person with the higher authority can prevail and the other person can either go along with it or (in extreme cases) withdraw their name from the project.
- If someone who is higher in the agreed author list has a different vision from multiple people who are lower, that person should try to convince the others. If that persuasion is not successful, the person who is higher should move down the author list to let the other people try it their way.
- Often times the paper will be rejected or will sit on their desk for a year. Suggest now that if the paper is still not published in 12 or 18 months, you would like to try it your way, and wait.

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Breaking up



- If someone is a bad lead collaborator, give in to them on this paper, and simply do not work with them again.
- If you have a collaborator who consistently undermines your input and makes you feel like you're not very good (but still wants on your publications...) you definitely can and should stop working with them.
- Collaborations are like any other relationships: some people arrive with all the baggage in the world and it doesn't matter how good or motivated you are, you cannot fix them

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A good collaborator



- Forms a long term relationship
- Rides out the swings and roundabouts
- Is generous and supportive
- Is reliable
- Tries not to over-commit ☺
- Under-promises (i.e., give yourself more time than you think you need – if you think you can finish a draft or provide feedback by Friday, say you'll send it within 2 weeks)

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A good collaborator



- Makes you feel motivated and inspired
- Helps you meet deadlines
- Builds your skills
- Improves your ideas and communication
- Builds joyful productivity into your career

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