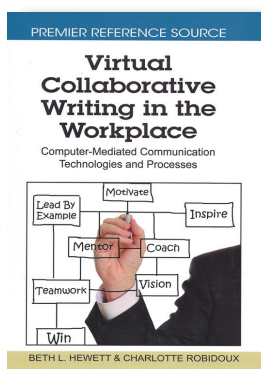


Virtual Collaborative Writing in the Workplace: Computer-Mediated Communication Technologies and Processes

Beth L. Hewett and Charlotte Robidoux. 2010. Hershey, PA: Information Sciences Reference. [ISBN 978-1-60566-994-6. 479 pages, including index. US\$180.00.]



Collaborative writing, sometimes across multiple continents, is becoming a fact of a technical communicator's life. This substantial book not only describes principles, practices, and examples of successful virtual collaborative writing, but also is itself an example of what a dedicated team of geographically

dispersed writers with both industry and academic backgrounds, connected through digital technology, can accomplish using virtual collaboration.

The first section overviews the literature of collaborative writing and highlights the move from traditional collaborative writing efforts into the virtual arena. The book's core revolves around six principles for virtual collaborative writing. Each of the main sections deals with one of these principles, starting with a case study, followed by two or more chapters elaborating on that principle. The table of contents provides chapter summaries, making it easier for readers to hone in on a particular area of interest. Sections describe creating a culture of collaboration while building a virtual writing team; managing team dynamics, including developing leaders and establishing trust; planning and making decisions virtually; developing content virtually and using tools and collaborative modes effectively, including measuring and tracking performance; creating structure as a way of supporting content quality and consistency; and using new media in virtual collaborative writing. In short, virtual collaboration is more than cooperation; it is, in fact, interdependence.

In creating this book, harmonizing the theoretical perspective of the academic authors and the practical

concerns of the workplace practitioners was challenging. Some of the writing does tend to be academic, but for the most part the text is well balanced and readable.

Virtual Collaborative Writing in the Workplace works well as a course text or a practitioners' guide. The case studies in particular leaven this content with stories of real-world collaboration experiences. Most chapters end with practical suggestions that can serve as a springboard for those who are considering or are in the midst of a virtual collaborative writing project. The book has an excellent glossary of virtual collaborative writing terms, an extensive bibliography, and a comprehensive index that makes accessing information easy in this rather large book.

The last chapter summarizes the experiences of the authors in collaborating virtually to create this book. Anyone managing such a project might find this the most useful chapter in the book, as it includes comments by the writers about what worked and didn't work, along with tables tracing the application of most of the principles and their results. One writer captured the essence of the whole collaborative writing experience: "our editors allowed us to create a collection of people, not just text and words" (p. 432).

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