



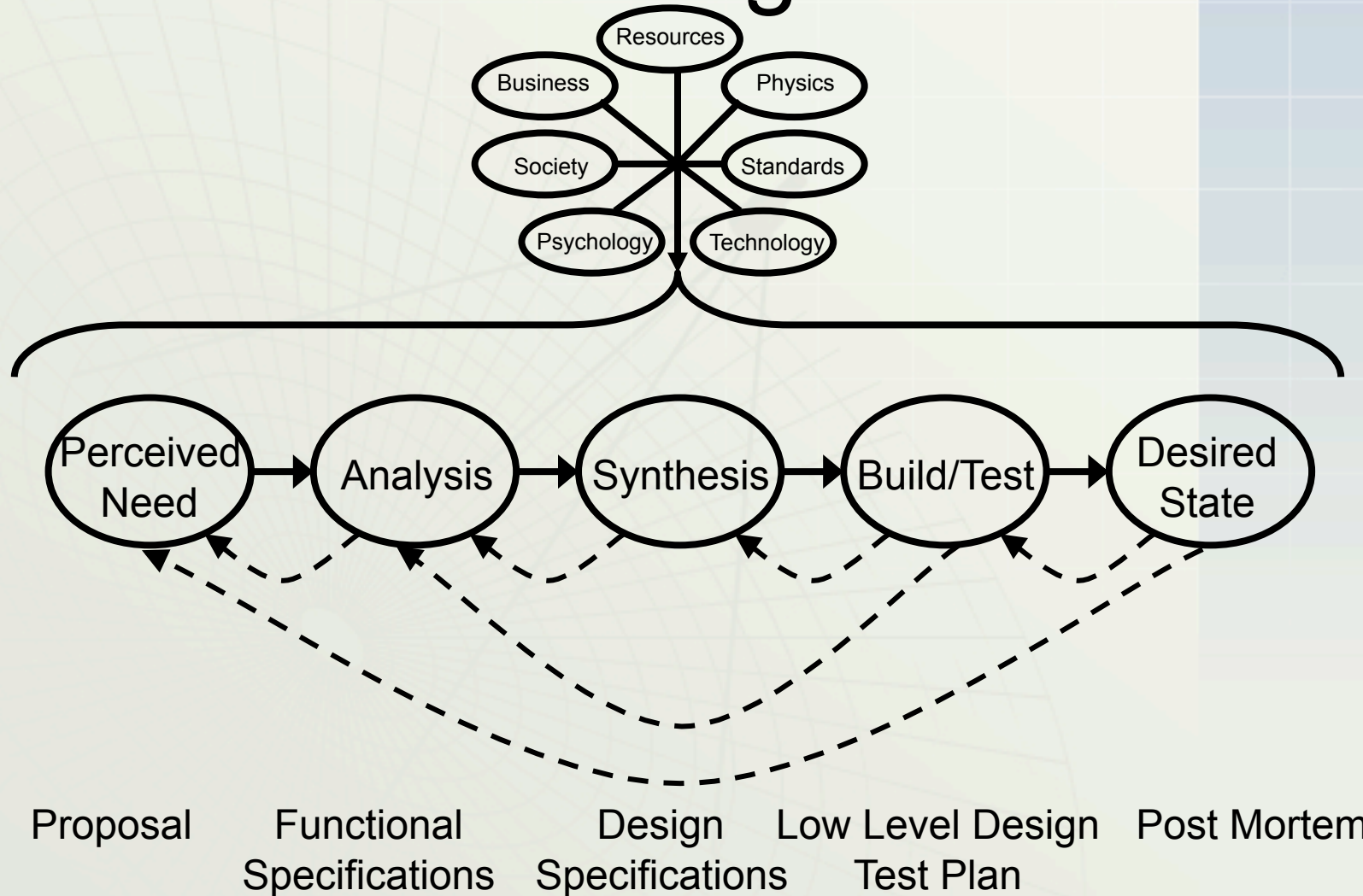
# Collaborative Writing & Dispute Resolution

**“Watch out for the Stobor.”**

*–Robert Heinlein, Tunnel in the Sky*



# Iterative Design Process





# Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you will understand the following:

- When to use a collaborative writing strategy
- The benefits and drawbacks of collaborative writing
- The collaborative writing process (planning, drafting, revising)
- Providing constructive criticism
- How to resolve disputes
- Dealing with groupthink



# Team Writing

## When to use a team writing strategy

- When a large document must be produced in a limited time
- When producing a document requires a broad range of expertise
- When divergent or opposing viewpoints must be resolved
- When you need to clarify a team position or shared approach



# Benefits of Team Writing

- Better documents
- Enhanced creativity
- Improved interpersonal skills and increased confidence
- A better understanding of your composing process and of how others compose
- A greater appreciation for the importance of individual differences
- A better understanding of how you and others solve problems
- Lasting friendships





# Drawbacks of Team Writing

- Sometimes requires more time than writing a document by yourself
- Can require a lot of energy to resolve disagreements
- Ego sometimes interferes, especially when some team members are particularly wed to specific ideas and styles
- Lasting enemies



# Team-Writing Processes

Approach	Description	Comment
Team composing	2 or more writers plan, draft, revise, and edit together	Useful for short pieces, to pool resources, to achieve consensus
Single file	Different individuals draft, revise, edit, etc.	No opportunity for team interaction or critical review
Combined	Mix of above such as collaborative planning and revising, and individual drafting	Combines efficiency with benefits of collaboration



# Drawbacks of Team Writing

Would you draw a picture of a house like this?







# Team Planning

## **Establish objectives and analyse readers**

- Clarify the objectives the document must fulfill to be successful
- Analyze the readers for whom the document is intended and decide on an effective approach



# Team Planning (Cont'd)

## Plan content and generate an outline

- Decide upon content, organization, graphics, format, and style (use a template)
- Generate a topic outline for the document (what information must be included and how to weight and arrange the subjects)



# Team Planning (Cont'd)

## Finalize approach and assign roles

- Decide which approach you will use for drafting and revising the document.
- If possible, agree on a common operating system, word processor, and graphics program.
- Assign individual tasks equitably.
- Set the deadlines required to complete the document in time to meet overall project deadlines.



# Team Planning (Cont'd)

## Review and clarify agreements

- Review the outline to ensure that all content requirements have been met and the topics are logically ordered.
- Ensure that everyone is clear on and agrees to the approach, task division, and schedule.



# Team Drafting?

- Useful when working on a short document (or parts of a larger document) in which complete agreement about word choices or issues is critical
- May help when working on a document where the enhanced creativity or diverse viewpoints of the team generates solutions that an individual cannot

**Note:** In most circumstances, drafting is done individually by team members because it is far more efficient than team drafting.





# Team Revision

- Decide who will make changes and arbitrate disagreements
- Consider rhetorical effectiveness (Is the purpose achieved? Is the audience addressed? Is the tone appropriate?)
- Review content and organization
- Consider sentence structure, style, grammar, and punctuation
- Inspect the formatting, check the spelling



# Steve's Maxims for Collaboration

- If you do the final formatting and editing, you get to remove all the changes made by others with which you disagree ;-)
- You should always tell the other writers that document sections are due a week before you really need them. That way you get to procrastinate more than anyone else. ;-)
- Doing the final formatting and editing is a pain in the butt, so you deserve a few perks. ;-)



# Providing Constructive Criticism

- Evaluate from the reader's perspective
- Focus on the writer's purpose
- If possible, comment on your second reading (read the document the first time simply to get a general impression of its content organization, and rhetorical effectiveness)
- Avoid telling other writers what to do
- Comment on positive as well as negative features
- Do not force your stylistic preferences on another writer



# Resolving Conflicts

- Accurately define problem
- Focus on problem not personalities
- Respect interests of all team members
- Limit conflicts and address everyone's concerns
- Seek a solution agreeable to everyone



# Six Steps to Dispute Resolution

1. Fully and clearly identify the problem to be resolved.
  - a) Describe all sides to the dispute.
  - b) Listen carefully to all sides.
  - c) Ensure everyone accepts the definition of the problem.
2. Generate alternative solutions to the problems.
3. Evaluate the alternative solutions.
4. Ensure that all members accept decisions.
5. Implement the solution to the problem.
6. Set a target date to evaluate the effectiveness of the solution.





# Symptoms of Groupthink

## **Loyalty, unity, agreement**

- Deviation from group consensus is not permitted
- Doubts and concerns are not expressed
- Minority viewpoints are ignored
- Criticisms from outside the team are not shared within the team

## **Obstruct critical thinking**

- Overly optimistic; risks ignored
- Negative feedback or discrepancies ignored
- Ethical implications ignored
- Competitors are viewed as evil, weak, incompetent



# Dealing with Groupthink

- The best way to prevent groupthink is to encourage a team member to act as “Devil’s Advocate”
- All members need to acknowledge the valuable contribution of the person who takes this role
- Don’t dismiss this person’s comments



# Embracing Diversity

- Accept that others know more than you in key areas
- Invite others to challenge your assumptions and dispel your stereotypes
- Encourage and maintain open lines of communication with everyone on the team
- Facilitate consensus building by listening to and respecting different points of view
- Understand the need to compromise to achieve team goals



# A Student's Perspective

ENSC 340/305 has been both a pleasure and a pain-in-the-ass for me.

– Cory Jung, 2002



# Conclusion

**“Cheop’s Law: Nothing ever gets built on time or within budget.”**

*–Robert Heinlein*