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Maximizing the Psychological Benefits of Writing Groups for Faculty: A Psychologically Informed Framework

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Faculty face increasing demands for service and teaching, resulting in decreased time for scholarship despite high expectations for academic productivity. These competing demands result in many faculty finding it to challenging to engage consistently in academic writing. This article briefly overviews the literature on academic writing groups, with attention to their value and challenges with implementation and success. We then offer a case example of our own interprofessional writing group that has been meeting and evolving for the past five years. To maximize the benefits of academic writing groups, we offer a psychologically informed framework that attends to three key dialectics: flexibility versus structure, person-centeredness versus team-based, and acceptance versus change. This psychologically informed framework recognizes that effective writing groups differ from one another and vary within themselves over time in terms of where they fall on each dialectical continuum. Based on our experiences as faculty in an interprofessional writing group invested in navigating these dialectics combined with the pertinent literature, we offer specific strategies for Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) staff to consider when implementing a psychologically-informed model in a manner that promotes teaching, learning, scholarly productivity,

connection, and well-being. The effectiveness of these strategies will require further investigation of both processes and outcomes using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Introduction: A Psychologically Informed Framework to Maximize the Benefits of Writing Groups for Faculty

Virtually all academic institutions expect faculty members to engage actively in scholarship and research, which typically requires writing in the form of manuscripts and/or grants. Yet, many faculty members experience competing professional demands (e.g., teaching, service) and encounter unique professional and personal challenges that interfere with their capacity to be productive writers. Writing groups are a commonly employed structure for assisting faculty in overcoming these difficulties by both helping them engage actively in the writing process and providing them practical and emotional support for writing in the context of other academic and personal demands. As a result, faculty often turn to writing groups to assist them, particularly given promising evidence that such groups are associated with scholarly progress and productivity, enhanced work satisfaction and professional development, and greater well-being (Arrazola et al., 2020; Dwyer et al., 2012; Franks, 2018; Kwan et al., 2021; Thorpe et al., 2020). These groups also show promise in increasing participants' motivation, competence, confidence, and excitement about getting published (Chai et al., 2018; Fleming et al., 2017; Pololi et al., 2004; Steinert et al., 2008). Writing groups help participants learn relevant skills (e.g., time management, publication process), practice reflection, develop collaborative relationships, receive peer support and feedback, and access mentors (Arrazola et al., 2020; Chai et al., 2018; de Caux et al., 2017; Kwan et al., 2021).

Despite evidence for the utility of writing groups, faculty often encounter time and motivational barriers to participating in a writing group. To address pertinent barriers, we recommend that Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) staff adopt a psychological framework when building and sustaining a writing group culture. To set the stage for this psychologically informed framework, we summarize the structure, benefits, and challenges

of writing groups. We then present a case example of our own writing group, which is embedded in an academic health center context. Next, we articulate a psychological framework that attends to three dialectical processes: remaining flexible versus providing structure, being person-centered versus team-based, and prioritizing acceptance versus embracing a change orientation. This framework is based on a review of the literature including relevant data and the extensive experience of the authors, but requires more empirical validation moving forward. Within the context of this framework, we delineated strategies that CTL staff may find valuable in guiding writing groups in navigating these three dialectics. While more process and outcome data are needed, we believe that writing groups that determine their location on each dialectic and navigate these dialectics in response to the changing reality of group members and their needs have the potential to promote individuals' career development and scholarly productivity, increase members' satisfaction, and foster interprofessional connection and collaboration among group members.

Writing Groups

Goals, Structure, and Benefits

The overarching goal of writing groups is to help faculty members attain their research and scholarly goals and disseminate information to the broader academic community. Academics have developed writing groups in a variety of disciplines to provide peer support surrounding manuscript preparation and the publication process for individuals at various stages of their career. Structured writing groups, which provide a platform for support and accountability as well as learning and collaboration, offer faculty opportunities to receive feedback on writing projects and aid people in navigating writing blocks and stuck points (Bergen et al., 2020; Brandon et al., 2015; Fleming et al., 2017).

Typically, writing groups meet regularly and include a small and consistent number of members to ensure safety and opportunities for quality feedback (Houfek et al., 2010). However, there are also models for writing workshops, focused writing retreats, and writing coaches (Cable et al., 2013; Steinert et al., 2008). Writing groups can be in person, virtual, or employ a

hybrid model. In addition, they may use an online platform, such as Facebook or Slack. Prior to the pandemic, our writing group met in person. We switch to Zoom at the outset of the pandemic and we have elected to continue to meet virtually, as it is a more accessible option for our members and equally effective in terms of writing productivity and peer support (Bourgault et al., 2022).

Writing groups may provide focused writing time or open discussion. Within our writing group, while many people just attend the monthly meetings, subgroups find meeting more regularly to co-write to be a productive approach. Group members may set and report on reasonable writing goals, share effective strategies (e.g., developing a regular writing schedule, using writing logs, completing one writing project at a time), and/or get assistance with overcoming barriers to writing (Houfek et al., 2010; Ness et al., 2014). Group members also may review one another's work and provide valuable feedback including edits. In our writing group, although giving feedback is not routinely built in to our structure or process, group members often request that others review their work or faculty with shared interests or those who are senior frequently volunteer to provide input.

Effective writing groups frequently include individuals at various career stages. In our writing group we have found that including faculty across the professional lifespan has enabled the early career faculty members to become familiar with the process of publishing, receive guidance from more senior colleagues on navigating publication challenges (i.e., selecting journals, working with co-authors, making revisions, focusing topics), and develop a consistent writing schedule. The more senior members of the group welcome the opportunity to "pay it forward" by mentoring and guiding others, while simultaneously receiving meaningful input and support for themselves (Pololi et al., 2004). In addition, a culture of peer mentorship has emerged in our group (Houfek et al., 2010).

Most faculty do not have formal training in scholarly writing (Sarnecka, 2019), a finding particularly true for those located in academic health centers (Cable et al., 2013; Oshino et al., 2020; Salas-Lopez et al., 2012). Thus, participating in a writing group can bolster participants' competence in academic writing, familiarize them with the publication process, increase

their productivity, and build their confidence and motivation (Brandon et al., 2015; Fleming et al., 2017; Houfek et al., 2010; Kornhaber et al., 2016; Manzano-Nunez et al., 2020; Salas-Lopez et al., 2012; Schick et al., 2011). Further, there is empirical evidence that the mentorship and guidance provided in the context of writing groups is associated with both teaching and learning (Bergen et al., 2020; Chiriack, 2014; Gillies & Boyle, 2011). In our writing group, learning about the process of writing, submitting for publication, and navigating editor recommendations and rejections through observation and conversation has been focal in the teaching and learning process and has been particularly valuable for the junior faculty members who heretofore have not garnered a lot of writing experience. More senior members of our group find value in mentoring more junior writers and benefit from the accountability process and the thoughtful questions posed by others in the group. Our writing group has boosted our members' writing productivity and decreased the anxiety and distress that often interferes with their writing progress in part by providing a structured and nonjudgmental environment in which we encourage one another to "approach" rather than "avoid" writing. Similar to what has been reported in the literature, members of our writing group state that their participation helps keep them accountable, makes them feel supported in the organizational aspects of writing, and enables them to overcome writing-related anxiety and other academic writing challenges (Bergen et al., 2020; Ness et al., 2014; Salas-Lopez et al., 2012). They also note that their involvement helps them navigate competing academic cultures and demands, balance academic responsibilities with non-work priorities, and make progress toward their goals (Badenhorst et al., 2013). Further, as is noted by others in the literature, members of our group openly acknowledge that belonging to the writing group has fostered their sense of accomplishment (Kornhaber et al., 2016).

Finally, there are interpersonal benefits of being a member and forming writing-related collaborative relationships (Kornhaber et al., 2016; Thorpe et al., 2020). Often, a writing group evolves into a community of practice, that is, a group of colleagues with a shared concern or interest (i.e., academic writing) and a desire to improve their competence related to academic writing through regular interaction with others in a committed social group (Sarnecka, 2019). Such a community of practice provides opportunities for

networking and collaboration (Schick et al., 2011). In our writing group's experience, the creation of a community of practice that includes faculty from all stages of professional development offers short-term benefits related to promoting rich discussion, supporting new collaborations, and reducing people's sense of isolation. One junior faculty member in our writing group commented, "I have really benefitted from the opportunity to network with and get informal mentorship from the senior faculty in our group" (Hampton-Farmer et al., 2013; Houfek et al., 2010; Straus et al., 2014). One of the most senior members of the group reflected, "I stay in this group because it helps me to stay on track with my writing and remain productive. And I like paying it forward as a mentor". We have found that including individuals across the professional lifespan has downstream advantages as well such as increasing our members' publication and grant application output, organizational investment, and likelihood of promotion (Kornhaber et al., 2016). In our experience, the advantages of group heterogeneity can be optimized when power dynamics are effectively navigated. This can occur when there is mutual respect among all parties and an openness to inquiry and self-reflection (Burgh & Yorshansky, 2011). Importantly, there are interpersonal benefits that extend beyond those associated with increased writing productivity, such as emotional support and camaraderie, a sense of belonging, and collective effervescence (i.e., sense of connection and meaning that comes from everyday collective events) (Gabriel et al., 2020; Maheux-Pelletier et al., 2019).

Challenges

Two sets of challenges for writing groups in academic settings are worthy of attention by CTL staff. First, faculty typically seek out writing groups to overcome personal and professional barriers to scholarly writing and to gain assistance in navigating the tensions between personal and professional demands that impede scholarly productivity (Badenhorst et al., 2013; Houfek et al., 2010; Oshino et al., 2020). Common personal challenges include lack of perceived competence as a writer or scholar; anxiety and/or perfectionism about writing, discomfort with and/or dislike for writing, lack of motivation, problems with procrastination, and fears of being judged (Oshino et al., 2020; Salas-Lopez et al., 2012; Tyndall & Caswell, 2016).

Frequently noted professional challenges include limited available time and energy for scholarly productivity due to competing demands (e.g., clinical work, teaching, service) and a perception that these other responsibilities are more time-sensitive and/or engaging (Arrazola et al., 2020; Oshino et al., 2020; Pittman et al., 2017; Tyndall & Caswell, 2016). For example, within the academic health center context, patient and training demands often take priority over scholarship (Cable et al., 2013). Members of our writing group have experienced barriers related to preparing manuscripts (e.g., defining the scope, clarifying and organizing the material, presenting the written material in accord with journal requirements) and responding to reviewer/editor input (Oshino et al., 2020). They often express concerns about insufficient training and mentorship, support and encouragement, and resources (Arrazola et al., 2020; Pittman et al., 2017; Tyndall & Caswell, 2016). They also report that when they devote time and attention to their personal lives, such as their family or hobbies, they feel a greater sense of balance and satisfaction and/or sense of well-being knowing they are meeting their responsibilities outside of the workplace (Penney et al., 2015), yet attending to these aspects of their personal lives leaves them with a lower capacity to focus on writing.

Second, as CTL staff are aware, there are challenges associated with writing groups themselves including varying levels of engagement and the lack of an optimal mix of writers from different stages of professional development vis-à-vis academic writing, which can limit the availability of senior mentors (Kornhaber et al., 2016). A second writing group-specific challenge relates to group tensions regarding the extent to which the group balances structure and flexibility, is person-centered versus team-based, and focuses on acceptance as opposed to change. While our writing group has navigated these tensions effectively through honest sharing, open conversation, and a willingness to modify the group over time as members' needs and preferences change, other groups find these discrepancies difficult to manage in a way that supports and advances members' careers. Writing groups that have a good breadth of faculty and that are successful in managing tensions that arise within the group are likely to lead group members to feel more engaged because they find the group helpful in empowering them to be productive writers and enjoy the interpersonal and

collegial aspects of participation.

Case Example

Approximately five years ago, within our department's faculty development structure and in response to concerns expressed by many faculty members about writing productivity and success, we launched an interprofessional writing group. This group meets for one hour monthly and has been virtual since 2020. On several occasions, a subset of the group has met for longer writing retreats. Membership is open to all faculty within the department, but it has organically coalesced into a stable set of 15-20 members, with approximately 10 faculty attending each meeting. Members range from newer junior faculty with few publications and limited protected research time to well-published senior faculty in departmental leadership roles. For the first four years of the group, the meetings focused on group members sharing updates on their successes and challenges in reaching their individually determined monthly writing goals, as well as discussing strategies for overcoming one writing challenge experienced in the prior month by one or more members of the group. Example of prior writing challenges discussed include: optimizing writing time through scheduling writing blocks and writing retreats, using accountability partners, navigating co-authorship conversations, prioritizing commitments and saying no to requests not in line with one's goals or values, and securing support around writing stuck points and struggles with avoidance. During the past year, we began alternating meetings between sharing updates and addressing writing challenges with working on this manuscript. This shift also meant that for the first time we systematically reviewed each other's writing.

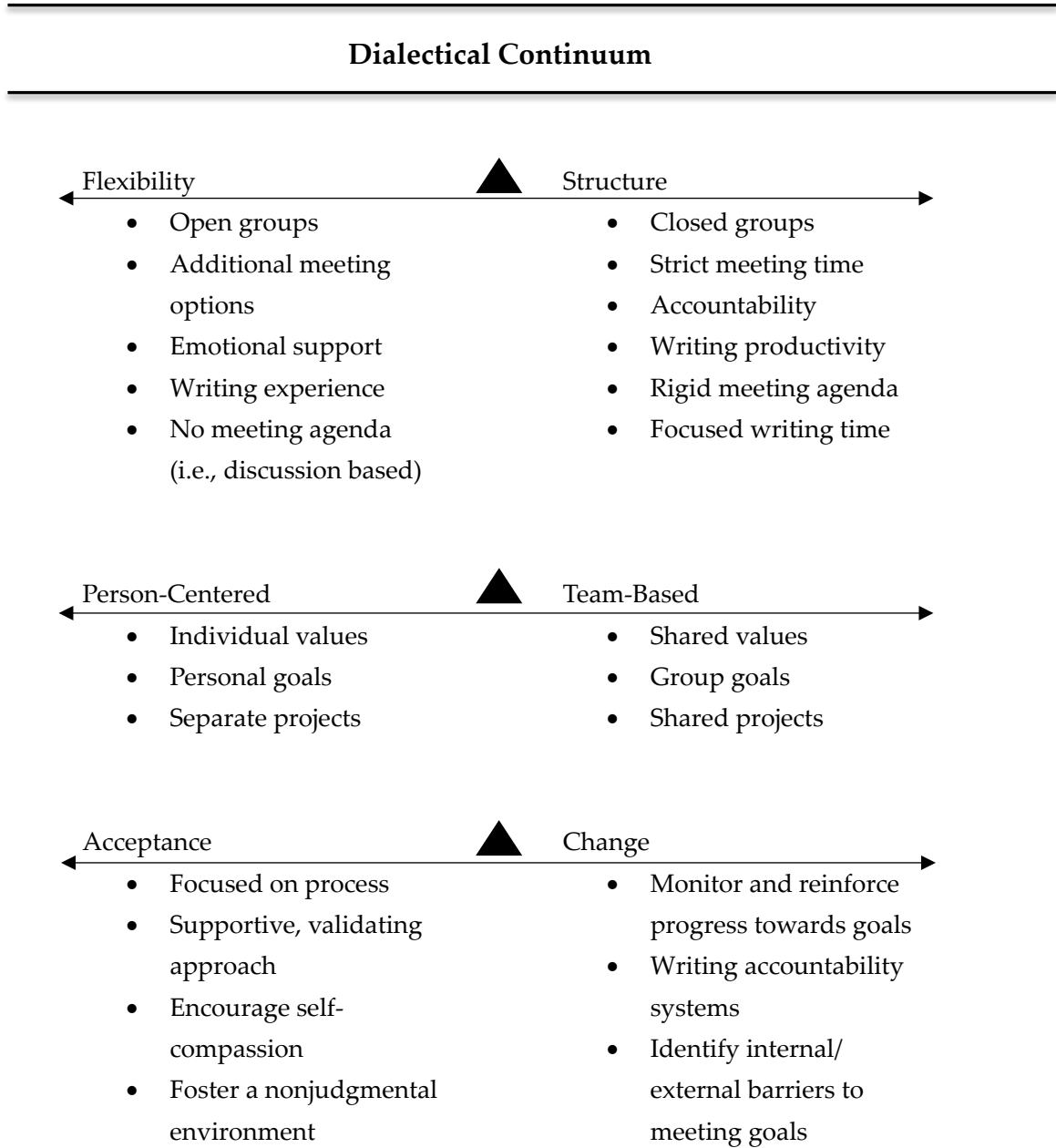
The following is a more detailed description of a specific writing group session. At a recent meeting, for the first half hour people talked about their progress/lack thereof the prior month. One junior faculty member updated the group on their efforts to revise and resubmit a manuscript and indicated their plan to resume work on another manuscript, a mid-career faculty member talked about needing to make progress on multiple projects simultaneously (e.g., book chapter, grant application, revise/resubmit manuscript), and a senior faculty member provided updates on eleven

projects at different stages and associated priorities. Two faculty members commiserated over similar revise and resubmit requests for extensive analytic changes, while another member asked for advice on navigating unresponsive co-authors. Group members celebrated all levels of progress, nonjudgmentally provided support for goals not met, and shared feedback when relevant or requested. The remainder of the meeting was spent addressing the request for advice on navigating unresponsive co-authors. Several faculty shared examples of similar dilemmas from their own experience, which served to validate the group member's experience. Many group members offered practical advice for addressing the problem such as setting a firm deadline for a response and indicating that if feedback is not received by that date there will be an assumption of their consent to proceed with submission, asking co-authors when they might have time to assist with or review the revisions and accommodate to their schedule, offering people the option not to serve as a co-author if they do not have the bandwidth to contribute, and having a conversation rather than an email interaction. The member who asked for advice was grateful for both the support and the guidance and volunteered to share updates at the following meeting or reach out in the interim if more assistance would be helpful.

Psychological Framework and Recommendations

To promote the benefits of writing groups and mitigate their challenges, we offer a psychologically informed framework that attends to three key dialectics that we encourage CTL staff to embrace when formulating and implementing writing groups based in academic institutions. The concept of a dialectic draws upon both classical and modern philosophy. It is rooted in the idea that everything is comprised of seemingly opposing perspectives and that progress occurs where these different views are integrated. The first dialectic for writing groups to balance relates to the extent to which they are structured versus allow for flexibility. The second dialectic for groups to address to succeed is to balance being person-centered with being team-based. In addition, the third dialectic that must be focal is acceptance versus change. See Figure 1 for depiction of these dialectics.

Figure 1: *A Dialectical Psychological Framework for Maximizing the Benefits of Writing Groups.*



The following section describes each dialectic and offers recommendations for CTL staff to use a dialectical framework to inform the operational and process features of an academic writing group and create a culture that supports publication productivity. Many recommendations align with more than one dialectic and thus are discussed in association with the most relevant dialectic. These recommendations build upon the literature on successful academic writing groups and capitalize on our experience over the past five years as members of an interprofessional writing group that includes junior, mid-career, and senior faculty. Our group meets monthly, and although initially held in person, moved to a virtual platform during the pandemic and will remain virtual to increase accessibility and facilitate participation and sense of community (Hodges et al., 2020). The group is inclusive; all members of the faculty within the department are welcome to participate. However, membership has been relatively stable over time, with changes in membership typically occurring at the outset of the academic year. The group has 15-20 members, with approximately 10 members attending each meeting. Moving forward, we plan to study more systematically the factors associated with the longevity of our group including group members' perceptions of the benefits of their participation, concrete writing outcomes, and other professional accomplishments.

Dialectic 1: Balance Structure with Flexibility

The first dialectic for writing groups to balance relates to structure versus flexibility, which includes issues related to group organization and membership, expectations, and processes. Both structured and more unstructured or flexible groups have their advantages in terms of writing productivity and related soft skill development (e.g., confidence in writing, giving and receiving writing feedback) (Allen, 2019). The optimal balance can be achieved if group members communicate regularly about their needs and desires for the group, which may change over time (Sarnecka, 2019). Thoughtful intentionality related to the balance between structure and flexibility is important given that the combination of structure and a focus on accountability along with flexibility in design and expectations is

associated with group members' reporting increased engagement, productivity, and sense of hopefulness. Moreover, such a balance promotes professional friendships among group members characterized by loyalty to the group and one another, mutual support and encouragement, and genuine enjoyment in sharing and learning about one another's successes (Ness et al., 2014).

Group Membership and Organization

From the outset, CTL staff can either make decisions about group membership, organization, frequency, and duration of meetings or encourage each group that forms to do so (Brinthaupt et al., 2021). Closed groups in which membership stays the same over time are typically small, which leads group members to develop closeness and trust and prioritize accountability (Badenhorst et al., 2013). Conversely, open groups, which tend to be more flexible than closed groups, are more inclusive regarding membership, which allows for greater breadth and diversity of feedback. CTL staff should encourage groups to revisit membership and organization decisions as members' needs and preferences evolve.

Our group has navigated the structure-flexibility dialectic by finding a middle ground in which the group is mostly closed for the duration of the academic year and re-opens for new members at designated times (e.g., beginning of each academic year), though also allows for some flexibility/exceptions to be made on a case-by-case basis (e.g., a new faculty member joins in the middle of the academic year and is interested in joining). We have prioritized the structure of a set meeting time each month, while allowing for flexibility in the content that is covered in each group (usually determined ahead of time), including reviewing progress on writing goals or working on shared projects such as a manuscript (see section on "process" for more detail). Group members have also scheduled longer writing blocks together (e.g., writing retreats in which members meet virtually to work on separate projects for a longer meeting time) and have participated in longer-duration writing retreats in which they write for short periods per day for a set period of time (e.g., one month) to enhance productivity consistent with data showing the benefits of more intensive writing workshops (Steinert et al., 2008). Our group has been thoughtful about movement along the

structure-flexibility continuum as we recognize the impact such decisions can have on group dynamics such as feelings of safety and cohesion, while also allowing for other potentially competing values such as inclusivity.

Expectations

It is important for CTL staff to bear in mind that navigating the structure-flexibility dynamic is key to determining group expectations. The effective negotiation of the structure-flexibility dialectic requires a recognition that while all members share the goal of scholarly productivity, some members primarily want to access a structure for writing accountability, whereas other members do so seeking encouragement and support for consistent writing and associated challenges (Sarnecka, 2019). For example, more senior members in our group often use the group as a monthly check-in to ensure movement towards more advanced publication goals, whereas more junior members may have expectations surrounding a first publication or scholarly article or making progress in publishing their dissertations. Again, either CTL staff decide a priori or recommend that writing groups themselves determine the extent to which each participant is expected to set and hold to a regular writing schedule and make concrete progress (e.g., word counts, completion of manuscript sections) (Franks, 2018) versus set their own goals and share progress as they see fit. Such decision-making also must consider whether the group as a whole versus each member of the group determines each person's writing goals and what counts as consistent writing (i.e., frequency, amount of time, quantity of output) (Skarupski & Foucher, 2018).

Process

Pertinent to the structure-flexibility dialectic, CTL staff can guide writing group members in developing consensus about several aspects of group process, which can be altered as members' needs and preferences shift. These process considerations relate to the writing experience and writing productivity. One primary process issue relates to the extent to which individual check-ins (i.e., reviewing the status of each member's goals and determining if unmet goals should remain on the writers' accountability list)

are the primary focus of the group and expected from all parties, simply a component of the group structure, and/or conducted electronically between meetings. Best practices for writing groups underscore the value of some type of check-in process, as it fosters accountability (Skarupski & Foucher, 2018).

Our group prioritizes the structure of time for check-ins in each group meeting, though moving along the structure-flexibility dialectic, will schedule, with group consensus, time to use our meetings for a specific project or topic of discussion and reduce time dedicated to check-ins or update each other on writing goals electronically. Prioritizing a structured check-in reflects our value of providing accountability to our members, while also allowing for flexibility in the group process. In addition, while group attendance is optional and thus members have the right not to share their progress or lack thereof, our group has found it helpful to create a culture in which members share when their writing is not progressing so they can receive support and guidance that may facilitate their subsequent progress.

A second and related process issue pertains to the extent to which group check-ins are focused specifically on writing productivity versus more broadly on the writing experience. For example, in our group, if a member is struggling with an issue (e.g., navigating interpersonal dynamics in which co-authors are not contributing adequately to a manuscript, or feeling blocked after receiving a rejection on an article), we may favor flexibility by shortening check-in time related to progress reporting to focus instead on group problem-solving about the challenge. In the case of feeling blocked after receiving a manuscript rejection, our group will aide a member in exploring what is contributing to their block, share experiences individual members have had in being productive after a manuscript rejection, and help the person set goals and identify next steps they need to take to get “unstuck.” Writing groups that help one another problem-solve optimally attend to and validate the person’s strengths in a manner that reflects sensitivity to their personal and professional developmental phases and challenges. Such conversations can facilitate group members’ efforts to find solutions and make progress and/or lay the foundation for new partnerships to form related to shared scholarly interests.

A third process matter pertains to other components of group meetings such as the provision of concrete guidance, discussion of common challenges, and celebration of wins. Members of our group often provide guidance on all stages of the writing process, including preparing to write, writing itself, editing, submitting manuscripts, responding to reviewer input, and disseminating one's work (Healey et al., 2019; Sarnecka, 2019). The literature also suggests that direction can be provided in the form of distributing resources, such as those related to improving writing skills and other writing-related tips (Sarnecka, 2019). In addition, members of our group often offer one another guidance for overcoming challenges to scholarly productivity based on their stage of career development, professional focus, and writing project demands (Oshino et al., 2020). More specifically, discussions of common difficulties have focused on carving out time to write, managing competing demands that affect scholarly productivity, developing agreement about authorship order, handling critical reviews, and managing conflicts with co-authors. We often utilize the experience and mentorship of more senior members of the group to help navigate these challenges. The structure we have utilized for such conversations includes members sharing their own experiences navigating similar dilemmas, normalizing the challenges, and helping the individual to develop strategies to overcome these difficulties and barriers. As one member of the group stated, "I feel less isolated with my writing and less in a writing vacuum when people in our group help me think through my ideas, give me concrete feedback on what I write, and offer me tips about handling interpersonal challenges related to getting an article published." Another member shared, "The beauty of our writing group is that we work together, are interested in each other's topics, and have strong bonds outside of the group. The connections are deep and in that sense, people can be vulnerable and we are motivated to see and help each other overcome barriers." To further facilitate people's writing efforts, CTL staff may encourage participants to engage in therapeutic writing, which can foster emotional catharsis and healing, promote their mastery of common problems (e.g., writer's block, procrastination), and facilitate their efforts to find meaning and purpose (Boice, 1993; Mugerwa & Holden, 2012). Our group also makes a point to celebrate writing wins, which have focused on

publishing a long-delayed dissertation manuscript, starting a section of a manuscript that a member had been avoiding, or getting a manuscript accepted after several revise and resubmits. We have found that celebrating such wins reinforces and sustains people's writing behaviors and is interpersonally rewarding, fostering a sense of cohesion within the group.

A fourth process issue pertains to the extent to which individuals write solely outside the group time, have dedicated writing time during regularly scheduled group meetings, and/or schedule extended writing meetings/retreats. In our group, we have navigated the structure/ flexibility dialectic by forming subgroups of individuals striving to attain specific goals (e.g., meet a submission deadline), accomplish shared writing goals (e.g., co-authored publication), and or/ provide one another feedback on written text. Our group on several occasions has set a writing block of time in which group members meet in person or virtually, work on independent writing projects, and provide each other accountability and support. As one group member said, "I got more writing done in the 3-hour block of time we set aside and were all on Zoom but in our own spaces than I normally do in a month, just because I felt less alone and got less distracted and so stayed more focused on the writing task at hand." CTL staff can recommend that groups consider hosting intensive writing sessions in light of evidence that such sessions have the benefit of protected time and space (Kornhaber et al., 2016) and are associated with increased productivity, especially if they are designed in accord with empirically supported frameworks (e.g., National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity).

Dialectic 2: Balance Being Person-Centered with Team-Based

The second dialectic for CTL staff to consider pertains to balancing a person-centered with a team-based orientation. More person-centered groups encourage members to select goals based on their values, both professional (e.g., promotion, recognition, basic involvement in scholarship) and personal (e.g., joy, non-work activities), as well as their priorities, which often relate to occupational expectations, career goals, and responsibilities outside of academic productivity (Healey et al., 2019; Wilson & Murrell, 2004). They also stress the importance of members being accountable for their own actions and productivity. To this end, these groups foster

members' commitment to their own writing goals, support each person's progress in accordance with their goals, and encourage people to make decisions about additional writing projects or roles based on their values. In our writing group, which prioritizes individual determination, we have developed a culture in which members share their self-reflective process and engage with one another in non-judgmental discussion about what is realistic for each person to accomplish given their professional and personal responsibilities and writing trajectory.

Conversely, team-based groups function more like a collective with shared values and expectations regarding commitment to academic writing and productivity. As such, members check in about their successes at meeting the agreed-upon goals for both the time they spend on writing and their progress in meeting their writing goals. Furthermore, a team-based approach can stimulate intellectual feedback and foster not just collegial relationships but highly valued "professional friendships" (Ness et al., 2014; Rickard et al., 2009).

A writing group culture that balances person-centered and team-based approaches appreciates that each member's capacity to write productively and efficiently is most likely to occur in a facilitative psychological context (Rogers, 1980; Sarnecka, 2019). Such contexts are relationally-oriented, non-competitive, and understand that "it takes a village" to raise an academic writer (Badenhorst et al., 2013). For example, when asked to describe the members of our writing group, people used the following words: "kind and inclusive," "respectful and compassionate," "caring and supportive", and "good mentors." Group members shared the following sentiments regarding the facilitative psychological context: "I appreciate when my colleagues highlight what I do well especially when it fits with my writing and career goals and acknowledges the other demands in my life." "I value getting feedback that recognizes that I am early in my career as an academic writer and I am trying to juggle all my work responsibilities with raising two young children." "Encouragement has helped me get unstuck at difficult stages in the writing process and persist in areas I'm still learning in. When I have felt stuck, getting the perspectives of others in the group has been invaluable." "Having a safe space to celebrate my academic writing achievements, like finishing challenging edits, getting a paper accepted for publication, and

getting board certified helped me feel good about what I accomplished and motivated me to keep going.” One person commented, “The support I get from the people in the writing group not only makes me feel part of a bigger community but also helps me feel less negatively impacted by the stresses at work.” Since academic writing often is an expectation but not central to our member’s daily responsibilities, such support and sense of belonging can be pivotal. We have found that navigation of the dialectic tension between being person-centered and team-based can have many benefits, including members feeling empowered, feeling a sense of comradery among members, and benefitting from being held accountable. Consistent with some research (Gurbutt & Houston, 2021), we have found that balancing between the person-centered and team-based dialectic also increases members’ confidence in their ability to write, improves their motivation, and nurtures their creativity and productivity. The relationships and associated culture and sense of group identity that emerges from a balance of being person-centered and team based can also foster members’ willingness to share their work and their writing struggles, be receptive to input and guidance, make progress toward their writing goals, experience a joy in writing, and succeed in their chosen pathways (Sarnecka, 2019).

An additional aspect of the person-centered versus team-based dialectic for CTL staff to suggest that group members consider pertains to engagement in their own projects that they discuss in the group versus participation in collaborative projects with other group members. Pursuing separate writing projects often aligns with individual interests and career goals. However, the structure and accountability of team-based writing promotes shared goals and fosters motivation. When the group identifies a topic and develops the writing plan as a team, it can help members overcome barriers associated with initiating and carrying out the writing process and can facilitate their development as competent and successful academic scholars (Salas-Lopez et al., 2012).

Dialectic 3: Balance Acceptance with Change

The third dialectic for CTL staff to be mindful of relates to balancing acceptance and change (Linehan, 2015). In an accepting context, members are supportive, empathic, and validating and encourage one another to be

compassionate and accepting toward themselves (Woloshyn et al., 2022). Such self-compassion and self-acceptance may be challenging given academics' propensity to be perfectionistic and self-critical (Pope-Ruark, 2022), which often inhibits writing effectiveness and productivity and negatively impacts well-being (Flaxman et al., 2012). To counteract these common reactions, CTL staff can guide acceptance-based writing groups in creating a safe space for writers to process their experiences, voice questions, engage in discourse, and receive positive reinforcement for their writing behaviors. Such groups often prioritize nonjudgmental accountability checks designed to focus members on what they can accomplish, give themselves grace for their challenges in writing, and acknowledge their own accomplishments both large and small. In addition to supporting people as they navigate the stresses of the writing process, such a nonjudgmental environment can mitigate the frequently encountered writing-related scrutiny and at times harsh feedback academics may experience via the peer review process, with co-authors, and from other sources (Silbiger & Stubler, 2019).

Groups that are primarily change-based monitor writing progress and focus on reinforcing progress when it occurs. CTL staff can inform such groups about potential structures they can create to foster writing efforts. Our group has focused on the "change" part of the continuum by creating writing "buddy" systems, in which two or more members set aside time to write together, functioning in a capacity similar to having a workout partner. Scheduling and honoring the time commitment provides a structure that makes writing feel less daunting, and the accountability and relationship building that occurs can involve intentional goal setting and normalizing each other's struggles related to writing, and can reduce people's anxiety and increase their self-compassion and sense of efficacy.

In our writing group, we have navigated the acceptance-change dialectic in a true "both-and" approach. For example, we have created a space where compassionate support of group members' writing and associated struggles (e.g., finding dedicated time to write and using this time as planned) are balanced with constructive suggestions that facilitate progress towards goals. Our members provide one another with understanding and nonjudgmental acceptance of where each person falls on the continuum of

writing engagement and productivity at a given moment and validate the inherent challenges that each member experiences associated with the writing process (Pittman et al., 2017). This is not meant to imply that no engagement in the writing process would be considered a positive outcome by the group as non-engagement it is not aligned with people's personal goals. Rather, when a member does not engage in the writing process in the ways they had intended, the group recognizes there is information to be gained and barriers the person needs assistance in overcoming. Such non-engagement is framed as a temporary and modifiable state. This understanding and nonjudgmental acceptance can foster self-compassion and self-acceptance in group members, which allows people to acknowledge how things are and begin to see ways they can change their approach to be more successful in their present moment circumstances, without such change representing something wrong with them personally or professionally that needs to be fixed. Emphasizing the acceptance part of the dialectic therefore allows people to be resilient and adopt a growth mindset and continue learning and being more productive with their writing over time.

Such understanding and nonjudgmental acceptance need to be balanced with promoting change and growth in ways that are responsive to each person's current circumstances. This change focus involves holding people accountable for developing the requisite competencies, taking positive steps aligned with their values, achieving their goals, and advancing their careers. In our writing group, this simultaneous focus on understanding and nonjudgmental acceptance along with an emphasis on change and growth occurs by encouraging group members to observe nonjudgmentally the challenges they experience and experiment with strategies for writing in an effort to find an approach that is effective for them in their current context. It also involves the provision of emotional and instrumental support within the context of the group, which facilitates individual members' acceptance of their current reality and empowers them to work toward greater writing progress. People in the group have responded to the balance of these two stances in various ways including setting more realistic and attainable goals, becoming intentional about scheduling and blocking writing times either alone or with colleagues, writing more about what interests them, re-

purposing projects (e.g., turning a seminar presentation into a manuscript), and incorporating rewards for achieving their writing goals.

Along the acceptance-change continuum, when a group member struggles to make progress on a goal, CTL staff can encourage the writing group to use an individual member's own values and goals to inform the extent to which they support the person in the change process. One pertinent example from our group was described as follows: "I just couldn't get my dissertation revise/resubmit turned around. I was grateful to the other people in the writing group whose thoughtful questions helped me figure out why I was so stuck. I felt less alone when some of the more mid-career and senior faculty in the group shared about similar situations in their careers in which they experienced emotional roadblocks to completing a cherished writing goal. People's concrete advice as well as their willingness to have me check in with them regularly made me feel less stuck so I was finally able to revise and resubmit the paper and it was accepted." As another example of finding the group both accepting and supporting change, another group member stated: "It helps a lot when people just validate how difficult it is when co-authors don't carry their load and don't even respond to emails. But I know that just getting this understanding isn't enough and so I also like it when others in the group discuss what they did in similar circumstances, share strategies that have evidence supporting their effectiveness, or help me think outside the box and figure out a different way forward and how to find better and more productive collaborations in the future" (Houfek et al., 2010; Keranen & Munive, 2012; Ness et al., 2014). Members of our writing group also recognize that the process of assisting members who are struggling may need to be repeated on multiple occasions until mastery is reached. Overall, writing groups committed to balancing acceptance with change offer an environment that provides people the tools they need to learn and grow, recognizes that individuals are "doing the best they can," and embraces the expectation for individual-level improvements in scholarly productivity. More specifically, such groups encourage their members to recognize and embrace their thoughts, feelings, and emotions related to scholarly writing without judgment but not with resignation or complacency. Accepting their current reality promotes members' self-awareness and serves as the basis for positive growth and change. Such

change requires developing new writing-related competencies or refining existing ones, challenging maladaptive beliefs about the writing process and productivity, and modifying behaviors that impede writing success. Embracing new ways of thinking and acting enables group members to be more productive and have a greater sense of well-being. As a result, within such a writing group context, group members can flourish.

Concluding Comments

Scholarly writing is key to faculty success in careers in academic institutions, yet many faculty members struggle with writing engagement and productivity, often due to perceived lack of experience with academic writing and competing personal and professional demands. CTL are well-positioned to implement and support a faculty writing culture through a range of initiatives, including writing groups (Brinthaupt et al., 2021). To this end, we strongly recommend that CTL staff sponsor an array of writing groups, as such groups offer a structure that can facilitate writing for publication among faculty. There is no right approach for ensuring the success of a writing group in an academic context. However, we believe CTL staff can capitalize upon a psychologically informed approach to designing and implementing an academic writing group to make such groups benefit individual productivity and work satisfaction, as well as enhance members' sense of community and belonging. The psychologically informed approach offered in this article highlights the need for each writing group to thoughtfully navigate three key dialectics in a manner that takes into account the unique needs of group members and the complex context(s) within which the group is embedded. The dialectics focal in this approach relate to balancing structure with flexibility, being person-centered while remaining team-based, and emphasizing both acceptance and change. Writing groups may align primarily with one or another of the poles of each dialectic or may fall somewhere in the middle of each dialectical continuum based on the group's purpose and stage of development as well as group members' preferences and personal and professional demands and successes. While the three dialectics emphasized in this article are an important starting point for all writing groups to consider, additional dialectics may be helpful to address in maximizing the responsiveness of the group. Moving forward,

additional research is needed to ascertain the short- and long-term effectiveness of writing groups informed by the three dialectics highlighted in this manuscript. Such work ideally incorporates a hybrid of qualitative and quantitative approaches that attend to group processes and individual and group outcomes beyond scholarly progress and work satisfaction. Such research should examine the association between the writing group structure and process, individual members' writing competence and productivity, and system/organizational factors that foster and/or inhibit writing success. Such research can lay the foundation for system-wide changes aimed at enhancing faculty members' writing productivity.

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