In our professional lives, we collaborate with others on a daily basis – on projects, on teams, and in meetings and committees and organizations. Collaboration can, and usually does, lead to getting stuff done. Let’s face it, everything is more fun with a partner (or two or three), right? And writing is no exception. For both the beginning writer and the experienced writer, collaboration can be beneficial for many reasons:

1.) Sharing the workload: this makes the actual writing part easier because you don’t have to do it all yourself.

2.) Motivation: when you take on a project with another person (or persons) you motivate one another because you want to finish and you don’t want to be the one holding everything up.

3.) A sounding board: having collaborators to talk with, and discuss ideas, can make a huge difference in making decisions on what to write, what to include, where to publish, etc.

4.) Editing: when you collaborate with others, you have automatic, built-in editors and proofreaders to catch things you may not.

5.) Accountability: this can be an important benefit, especially if you have problems completing projects on your own. Having someone else who is depending on you will provide you with more incentive to complete a task and stick to deadlines.
6.) Combined expertise: when you work with others, you are combining a varied set of experience, skills, and expertise. This can be beneficial because you can divide up the work based on what each of you are good at (writing, editing, revising, manipulating data, research, etc.).

7.) Sharing the good and the bad: after you complete your project, you have someone to celebrate its successes if it gets published, and someone to empathize with if it gets rejected.

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much” — Helen Keller

Collaborating with others can also have its challenges, so you will want to choose people you know fairly well, and people you already have a connection with. When you agree to collaborate on a writing project, make sure everything is outlined and mapped out, and there are deadlines that everyone can agree on. Figure out how you will communicate with one another (phone calls, email, Skype, chat, in-person), and how often (daily, weekly, monthly). Figure out who will be first author, at some point in the process, to avoid any conflict or awkwardness later on. In my experience, it is usually the person who takes the lead and does the most work, and there is almost always someone who will take the lead on any single project. And, there are many reasons that a collaboration or project doesn’t work out, and often it comes down to one thing: timing. So, if it doesn’t work out, put it on the shelf for a later day (maybe) and move on.

Another way to collaborate is with a mentor. A writing mentor can be an invaluable resource when you are starting out. A mentor should be someone you feel comfortable with, and someone who is willing to give you their time and advice. It is up to you to ask questions and to
come up with the terms of the mentorship. Ideally, you will be familiar with your mentor’s writing. You should try to choose someone who has published in the venues or formats that you wish to (or need to) publish in, so you can get the most relevant advice. This can be someone in your work place, or in an organization that you belong to, or someone you’ve admired and wanted to meet. Ideally, your mentor will be able to help you identify places to publish, give you feedback on your writing, and help in the editing and revision process, as well as provide guidance and support along the way.

Also, you may want to participate in a formal mentoring program that can cover a broad range of experience and skills and career aspirations. When you fill out your application, specify that you would like a mentor who has writing/publishing experience. Formal mentoring programs can be helpful for anyone starting out in their careers, or those who are switching from one type of librarianship to another.

Another option is to seek out a writing group, or form your own. Writing groups can help with motivation and accountability and creativity and revision and ideas, things that are so important when you are writing and submitting and trying to get published. Writing groups can also help you find potential collaborators.

My goal, in writing this article, is to motivate you to write for the profession, to share your voice and your stories and your experiences with your colleagues. The writing/publishing process isn’t as frightening or intimidating as it may seem, and it doesn’t have to be a lonely process. So seek out those collaborators and mentors and groups that can support your writing efforts. And get writing!
Librarian Mentoring Programs:

ALA’s NMRT Mentoring Program
http://www.ala.org/nmrt/oversightgroups/comm/mentor/mentoringcommittee

ACRL/NY Mentoring Program
http://acrlny.org/about2/mentoring-program/

MLA Mentoring
https://www.mlanet.org/mentor/

YALSA’s Virtual Mentoring Program
http://www.ala.org/yalsa/profdev/mentoring

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