

Collaborative IEP Writing: Tools for Team Input and Shared Accountability

Purpose & Overview

IEPs are meant to be team-driven documents, but too often one person (usually the special educator) ends up writing the bulk of the plan alone. This not only undermines the spirit of IDEA but also risks incomplete information, weak buy-in, and limited follow-through.

Collaborative IEP writing ensures the student's needs are fully understood, goals are balanced, and implementation is consistent across environments.

This worksheet provides structures, templates, and practices to make IEP writing a truly shared responsibility.

Why Collaboration Matters

- **Multiple perspectives:** Each team member brings unique expertise (academic, behavioral, functional, therapeutic, family).
 - **Accuracy:** Present Levels and goals reflect a full picture, not a single lens.
 - **Consistency:** Shared input increases fidelity in implementing goals and services.
 - **Trust:** Families see a genuine partnership when collaboration is prioritized.
 - **Sustainability:** Collaboration prevents burnout by distributing the workload.
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Key Roles in Collaborative IEP Writing

Role	Contribution
General Education Teacher	Shares classroom performance, access needs, effective accommodations.
Special Education Teacher/Case Manager	Leads the process, integrates data, drafts goals/services.
Related Service Providers (OT, SLP, PT, Counselor, Psychologist)	Provide data, service recommendations, and targeted strategies.
Family/Caregivers	Share child's strengths, challenges, preferences, and home-based priorities.
Student (when appropriate)	Identifies personal goals, preferences, and self-advocacy needs.
Administrator/LEA Rep	Ensures compliance, resources, and services are feasible.

Structures for Effective Collaboration

1. Pre-Writing Input Forms

- Send short surveys or forms to gen ed teachers, families, and related service providers.
- Include prompts such as: “*What are the student’s top 3 strengths?*” or “*Which accommodations do you see working most effectively?*”

2. Shared Data Tools

- Use a common progress monitoring sheet or digital tracker accessible to all team members.
- Example: Google Sheet with tabs for academics, behavior, related services.

3. Co-Writing Sessions

- Schedule collaborative time (even 20–30 minutes) where multiple providers draft sections together.
- Use breakout rooms or shared docs for simultaneous writing.

4. Checklists for Accountability

- Assign responsibilities for drafting specific sections (e.g., OT drafts fine motor PLAAFP, SLP drafts communication goals).
- Use a checklist to ensure all voices are included.

Sample Collaboration Planning Template

Student Name: _____

Meeting Date: _____

IEP Section	Lead Author	Contributors	Status
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Present Levels – Academic	Gen Ed Teacher	SpEd Teacher	Drafted
Present Levels – Behavior	School Psych	SpEd Teacher, Para	In Progress
Speech/Language Goals	SLP	Family	Not Started
Transition Goals	SpEd Teacher	Family, Student	Drafted
Accommodations	SpEd Teacher	Gen Ed, Family	Drafted

Collaboration in Action: Example Scenario

- **Student:** Middle schooler with ADHD and dyslexia.
- **Process:** Gen ed teacher provides recent classroom work samples; reading specialist drafts decoding goals; counselor contributes strategies for self-regulation; family shares that student enjoys graphic novels and responds to choice-making.
- **Outcome:** Final IEP includes integrated academic and SEL goals tied to both classroom performance and home priorities, ensuring the student is supported consistently across settings.

Sample Collaborative Goals Across Providers

Example 1: Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) + Special Education Teacher

- **Annual Goal:** Within 36 weeks, given graphic organizers and sentence frames, the student will produce a 5-sentence written paragraph with a topic sentence, 3 details, and conclusion in 4 of 5 opportunities.

- **SLP Objective:** Student will use targeted vocabulary (3–5 new words per unit) in both oral and written tasks with 80% accuracy.
 - **SpEd Objective:** Student will independently draft and revise a paragraph using a graphic organizer with 80% accuracy.
 - *Collaboration in Action:* SLP focuses on expressive language and vocabulary expansion, while SpEd teacher embeds that vocabulary into structured writing assignments.
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Example 2: Occupational Therapist (OT) + Classroom Teacher

- **Annual Goal:** Within 36 weeks, given adaptive tools and supports, the student will complete written assignments with legible handwriting and proper spacing in 4 of 5 opportunities.
 - **OT Objective:** Student will improve fine motor endurance by writing 3–5 sentences with proper pencil grip and posture in 4 of 5 opportunities.
 - **Teacher Objective:** Student will independently produce 5-sentence written responses using lined paper and adaptive tools, with 80% accuracy.
 - *Collaboration in Action:* OT focuses on mechanics of handwriting; teacher emphasizes content and production within classroom assignments.
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Example 3: School Psychologist + Special Education Teacher

- **Annual Goal:** Within 36 weeks, given direct instruction and supports, the student will use a self-regulation strategy to return to task within 5 minutes in 4 of 5 opportunities.
- **Psych Objective:** Student will identify and label emotions using a feelings chart in 4 of 5 opportunities.

- **SpEd Objective:** Student will apply a calming strategy (deep breathing, movement break) with 1 prompt in 4 of 5 opportunities.
 - *Collaboration in Action:* Psychologist builds self-awareness and identification of emotions; SpEd teacher reinforces and monitors strategy use within classroom settings.
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Example 4: Transition Specialist + Job Coach/Paraprofessional

- **Annual Goal:** Within 36 weeks, the student will independently complete a 4-step vocational task (stocking, collating, organizing, or cleaning) with 90% accuracy in 4 of 5 opportunities.
 - **Transition Specialist Objective:** Student will follow a picture-based task analysis for one vocational activity with 80% accuracy.
 - **Job Coach/Para Objective:** Student will generalize use of the task analysis in 2 different work settings with 80% accuracy.
 - *Collaboration in Action:* Transition specialist builds initial skill in structured environment; job coach supports generalization across contexts.
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Avoiding Common Collaboration Barriers

- **Barrier:** Team members assume “the case manager will handle it.”
 - **Solution:** Share responsibility explicitly with checklists and timelines.
- **Barrier:** Scheduling challenges.
 - **Solution:** Collect input asynchronously via shared forms and docs.
- **Barrier:** Over-reliance on jargon.

- **Solution:** Use family-friendly language to promote genuine input.
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Action Starter: Try Tomorrow

- Create or adapt a short **input form** (digital or paper) for families and gen ed teachers.
- Send it before your next IEP meeting and integrate at least one response directly into the draft.
- At your next team meeting, assign **one additional section of the IEP** for another provider to draft.