Tom Neumann's Handy- Dandy clip-n-save guide to working with co-authors. Tom is now at NASA. Used to be at UVM.

(1) send out initial outline and/or paper draft, offering potential co-authors a chance to be included. The earlier this step is done, the more benefit the main author will usually get. Often co-authors will reply with sections / ideas that they'd like to develop or can contribute to.

(2) present a specific timeline, or even an approximate timeline for feedback: "thanks for agreeing to work with us on this paper. My rough timeline is to circulate a first draft in X weeks/months/years". Yes years. The longest running paper at the Journal of Glaciology (I'm guessing) had a first draft by me in 1998, a submission in 2002, a revision in 2004, a second revision in 2008, and publication in 2009. I've got a commemorative T-shirt out of the deal.

(3) Try to keep to that timeline (hah!) and circulate the draft, specifying a target date for feedback: "Here is the first draft. Please send feedback by the end of the month if at all possible. If I do not hear from you by then, I'll assume that you are fine with the way the paper is developing."

(4) You'll actually get the feedback about a week after the due date. Eh, that's just how it seems to work.

(5) Clarify with the co-author or group when a question comes up. E.g. "Tom says he wants more process included here, while Paul finds there is too much, and not enough detail on methods". Ultimately, the lead author has to sort it out, but give co-authors the chance to clarify what was intended. The best way to do this is by including directions in the text in italics for example: "Tom, does this next part capture what you were getting at? if not, can you clarify?" Specific questions get results.

(6) Repeat steps 2-5 as the paper develops. These need not be long iterations. As the paper matures, the timeline for feedback should become shorter, but never less than a week. Ideally, the number of open issues will get smaller. Occasionally, you'll have divergent views on a topic, and that requires a whole additional level of negotiation. Sometimes, these are the most productive conversations, as they will focus on the most interesting part of the paper - and the most important scientifically.

(7) send the final version. "I intend to submit this Friday afternoon. Speak now, or forever hold your peace." You'll end up with a co-author who refuses to either sign off in a timely manner, or provide feedback: "I don't like Section 3, but can't get to it until next month". And then you're stuck for a month waiting. We've all been there (ask Paul!) and have sometimes been guilty of it. Patience will win

the day 95% of the time. The other 5% the co-author will remove themselves from the paper (yes, this does happen). Note that there rarely is a due date for papers (and we're all aware of that). The saving grace is that no one wants a paper that's almost done to collect dust on their desk, so co-authors will do their best to move it along. However, you never know what someone else is up against in other areas of their job (new classes? lab fire? three other papers waiting first?) so I suggest taking a breath, and waiting. Often, when coming back to a paper after a few weeks, you get the chance to read it again with relatively fresh eyes, and are able to read it critically again.

(8) Send the submitted version: "submitted to J. Glaciology on 22 Aug 2010." to all involved. If you're feeling gregarious add "thanks for all your help, I think it improved the paper substantially.". Actually, probably a good move to include that line anyway.

Abstracts tend to have a shorter fuse. However, the main author needs to plan to allow time to get through steps 2-5 at least once before moving on to step 7.

When reviews come back, the main author usually takes the first pass at parsing them into a list, and attempting to answer them. If the recommendation was "Accept with changes", the journal will nearly always want to see a detailed list of reviewer comments and how they were addressed.   After the first pass through the comments, return to Step 2 and iterate.