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**An Instructor Guide to Facilitating Student Peer Review**

This guide is for instructors who incorporate student-to-student feedback as part of writing assignments and who want to improve the quality of peer review. The guide lays out best practices, discusses types of student feedback, and provides sample structured peer review assignments.

The TLC also offers consultations to faculty who want to review their writing assignments. For more information, contact the writing center staff.

**PREMISES OF THIS GUIDE**

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|  | **Writing in many disciplines is an inseparable part of the community of practice**Writing clarifies and shares ideas of practice to benefit the whole community. It is not primarily solo work and needs the same collaboration and feedback as other areas of practice. Members of the community of practice can help each other achieve greater clarity through thoughtful peer review. Establishing a culture of shared practice in the classroom improves peer review. |
|  | **The primary goal of peer feedback is to improve the clarity of ideas**Readers in most disciplines value clear, evidence-based ideas.To help writers achieve clarity, early rounds of peer review should focus on organization, use of sources, and articulation of ideas. Accented written English reflects the multi-cultural identities of practitioners and often will not affect clarity.  |
|  | **Every peer reader is qualified to offer meaningful feedback to ever peer writer**Peers in the same discipline are one another’s audience in class and eventually in their professions. Effective student writers work to ensure that their ideas are clear to their peer readers. Effective peer reviewers feel confident in saying whether or not they understand their peer’s written ideas and work to help their peers clarify ideas. |
|  | **Peer feedback is most effective when instructors model feedback**Student-to-student feedback becomes more productive when they practice giving feedback on model assignments in instructor-led sessions that introduce genre conventions, show model student papers of varying quality, and provide language students can use in their feedback. |

**PROVIDE MODELS FOR WRITING AND FEEDBACK**

Instructors can set students up for success as writers and peer reviewers by discussing genre samples and modeling feedback. This strategy has the added benefit of providing students language they can use in their own peer feedback.

A few ideas:

* **Show examples:** provide student examples or samples from the field; point out what works and what doesn’t; highlight common elements and concerns; illustrate how different writers address similar assignments in different ways.

Try using multiple samples to show students different writing choices. “Copying” the sample helps some students learn.

I don’t like to show sample papers because students just copy the sample!

* **Deconstruct samples:** have students take apart well-ordered papers to see how they work. This works especially well with literature reviews and other genres that have flexible structures, as students get an idea of the choices writers can make. To deepen this experience, instructors can ask students to work in small groups to recommend changes to a paper that needs to be reordered.
* **Model peer review:** provide sample student writing along with a structured peer review worksheet. Have students work through the peer review point by point, offering model ways to respond, highlighting great student responses and redirecting responses that don’t properly address writing concerns.

**STRUCTURED FEEDBACK HELPS WRITERS PRODUCE CLEAR IDEAS**

When peer reviewers have a structured approach to providing feedback based in the principles of clear communication, they can more confidently review a work and respond in meaningful ways. A structured review session typically includes the clarity concerns below.

* **Genre knowledge**: even if a piece is very well written, it doesn’t work if it violates the genre conventions, yet students may never have written a literature review, policy brief, etc.

A structured peer review asks the reviewer to match the writing to the expected genre.

* **Order of ideas:** some assignments are highly structured; others, like literature reviews or research briefs, require a student to determine the order of ideas based on the needs of the topic. Students may struggle to build a coherent, sequenced argument.

A structured peer review prioritizes order of ideas.

* **Clarity of ideas:** when grappling with new disciplinary concepts and vocabulary, students may use abstractions, over-general language, passive constructions, and confusing syntax.

A structured peer review asks reviewers to note areas where they become confused or have questions.

* **Grammar and syntax:** while clarity of ideas remains most important, issues of grammar and syntax can sometimes derail clarity. When this is the case, reviewers may need to address them.

A structured peer review asks reviewers to note grammar and syntax only when they interfere with clarity, and then only to note areas for the writer to review.

**TWO TYPES OF FEEDBACK**

Composition theorist Peter Elbow describes two types of feedback in his book *Writing with Power.* “Criterion-based feedback” asks how a piece of writing measures up to predetermined standards. This is the most common type of feedback and often comes along with a grading rubric. “Reader-based feedback” asks how a piece of writing works for the reader – where the reader gets confused or intrigued, skeptical or convinced. Both types of feedback provide useful data to writers. The key is to train peer reviewers how to use these types of feedback.

**Criterion-Based Feedback**

Peer reviewers are most familiar with criterion-based feedback that asks how a paper matches a set of standards for organization, use of evidence, format, and grammar conventions. Yet students may not feel competent to judge or “grade” another student’s writing, or may not know where to focus their attention. They easily default to abstractions about paper “flow” or pointing out simple typos or grammar errors (sometimes incorrectly) at the expense of larger clarity issues.

To guide students to give criterion-based feedback, provide guided questions for a reviewer to address that reflect the most important elements of the assignment. Elbow provides 22 such questions in *Writing with Power.* Examples for a literature review might include:

* Does the writer provide an introduction that clearly describes the problem of practice?
* Does the writer incorporate at least 5 sources that all relate to the problem of practice stated in the introduction? If not, what is missing?
* Does each paragraph have one guiding idea? Identify the main idea of each paragraph by underlining it or writing it on the side of the paper.

**Reader-Based Feedback**

****Peer reviewers may have limited or no experience with reader-based feedback, though it is the type of feedback they can most easily give. Reader-based feedback provides nonjudgmental narrations of how readers interact with a piece of writing. When a student engages in good faith reader-based feedback, the results can be very useful to writers, letting the writer know where they have successfully translated meaning to their reader and where they need to clarify their ideas.

Examples of reader-based questions for a literature review include:

* After reading only the introduction, what is the topic of this paper?
* Does anything in this paper confuse you? Underline any words or sentences where you get lost or have to read more than once.
* Does anything surprise you?
* What do you find most interesting or intriguing in this paper?

Reader-based feedback encourages readers to give feedback such as “I had to read this sentence a few times.” “I’m not sure I understand this paragraph.” “This surprised me because I thought your paper was focused on adult patients – but this source is about children.” Once students get the hang of this type of feedback, they can become more confident peer reviewers.