

## Making Better Peer Reviews

### 1. Prepare students in advance.

- Students need to be warmed up to peer review. Don't expect them to be good at it without giving them direction!
- Take class time to talk about what you hope they will get out of the peer review--this sets the foundation for what things they will focus on during the review.
- Give students models to follow: put a very shoddy draft of the assignment (written by you the night before!) on the overhead and facilitate feedback. Use the comment feature, too! Ask an advanced student to come to class and model peer review with you on this shoddy first draft.
- Ask students to set the parameters for the peer review. Consider first having students write a rubric for their project by breaking down the prompt and identifying what they are actually supposed to do for the project. This also helps them prep for the peer review by the process of helping each other better understand the assignment, which helps them offer more meaningful, useful feedback.
- Ask students to construct a peer review handout or walk them through a peer review handout (checklists can be useful for this: see the example on page 3).

### 2. Talk about your process.

- Students do better work when they have a model. If you explain to them what your peer review looks like, they will come to see how giving and receiving feedback is not "busywork."
- Consider showing students the types of feedback you've received in the past.
- Consider showing students the feedback you've given a colleague in the past.

### 3. Use a writing center model (for global or higher-order concerns like thesis development, content development, organization, and use of evidence).

- Writing center pedagogy focuses on having conversations about writing that can lead to more meaningful revisions. Often, this revolves around global or higher-order concerns.
- Writing centers typically ask student-tutors to fall a pattern: the tutor uses small talk or rapport building, asks the student-writer to identify areas of discussion/weakness, helps the writer read the paper out loud, refrains from marking the paper, takes notes on content and organization, asks guiding questions, emphasized the writer's concerns, and helps the writer make a plan for revision.
- You may ask students to follow this model together, with particular emphasis on the question, "What do you, the writer, want to work on today?" This will support students' critical writing skills by helping them become better critics of their own writing. With repeated emphasis on writers' concerns, the writers become better able to identify the weaknesses in their writing.
- Ask students *not to mark* on each others papers. Instead, ask them to write a letter to the writer: the letter should indicate the strengths of the piece, areas that were unclear, and what types of grammatical errors the reader noticed. Then, the writer is asked to apply this feedback to her revisions. It's a good idea, too, to have writers type up a cover letter for their projects describing what feedback they incorporated and how.

#### 4. Make it social.

- Putting students into writing groups early in the semester gives them an active space to think and talk about their writing. Some teachers put students into groups within the first two weeks of the semester. The groups are required to meet at least once a week for at least 30 minutes: sometimes meetings are during class time, sometimes outside of class time. This ensures that students always have someone to talk to about their writing.
- Use a workshop model by devoting a set amount of time to a set amount of classes to review just *one* piece of writing as a class. Everyone gets a copy of the project in the first class period, reads it for homework, and writes a letter about it. Then, during class, everyone talks about what worked and what didn't, what could work better and how, and any other types of suggestions that might be useful to the writer
- Use a Moodle discussion board or Twitter hashtag feed (even during class!) to give feedback--there's nothing more exciting than live-tweeting a paper!

#### 5. Make it digital.

- Have students bring in their laptops, meet in a lab, or do peer review digitally outside of lab. Help students use track changes and the comment features of their word processing software. Send students to this Hope Writing Program video for information on how to use these two key features:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_8m6Si1nwTg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8m6Si1nwTg)

- Ask students to color coordinate by highlighting certain elements (or missing elements!) in a given project. This idea works well with a peer review handout.
- Have students use peer review software. For this academic year, you can use ELiReview.com for free! Here's the info:

[www.elireview.com](http://www.elireview.com)

Institutional code: thiefe896months

Students can even rate each others comments using this software! Their accounts are free, too! (Contact Courtney Werner at [werner@hope.edu](mailto:werner@hope.edu) for more information about using ELiReview in your class).

## Peer Review Sample Handout

\*\*This handout is used for first-year composition courses for a project that helps students better understand how to use paragraphing effectively. The content of your handout should change based on the objectives of your assignment.

(Insert brief reminder of prompt)

Writer's Name:

Reviewer's Name:

### Directions for the Writer:

1. Using the chart below, list 1-3 paragraphs you would like your reviewer to give special attention to.
2. List what you think is not working in these paragraphs and what type of feedback you think would help you. Be **as specific as you possibly can**.

| Paragraph Number | Trouble you're having | Feedback you'd like |
|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|                  |                       |                     |
|                  |                       |                     |
|                  |                       |                     |

### Directions for the Reviewer:

1. Using the chart below, give the writer **specific advice** on how to improve the paragraphs s/he asked for help on.
2. Then, give advice for one other paragraph that you think could be developed more in terms of big-picture issues. Be **as specific as possible**.

| Paragraph Number |  |
|------------------|--|
|                  |  |
|                  |  |
|                  |  |
|                  |  |

What did you think was the best part of this essay? Explain **in detail** why this was so good. Write a PIE paragraph to explain yourself fully.

**Directions for reviewer:** Place an "X" in the first column (the "Completed" column) to indicate if the author has included the element in her/his manifesto.

**Directions for writer:** If the first column is missing an "X," then you need to revise that element more fully. Speak with your reviewer about what you might do differently or how you might revise and edit for these various elements.

| Completed | Element  | Suggestions |
|-----------|--|-------------|
|           | 7 + paragraphs   |             |
|           | Appropriate section titles   |             |
|           | 800-1600 words (check for word count NOT including the author's name, title, date, course number, etc) |             |
|           | Each paragraph has a Point   |             |
|           | Each paragraph has at least one Illustration   |             |
|           | Each paragraph has some Explanation tying the Illustration to the Point                                |             |
|           | Second person pronouns are <b>avoided</b>  |             |
|           | Words like "one" and "you" are replaced with specific <b>nouns and</b>                                 |             |
|           |  |             |

