

Peer Review Guidelines*

The goal of peer review is to help you learn to give effective feedback to your classmates about their writing. The peer review process should look something like this:

Read your peer's paper once just to get a sense of the paper, jotting notes to yourself as you go.

Questions about organization. If you think a certain paragraph doesn't belong, you can describe your response as a reader; for example, "When I got to this paragraph, I wondered what it was doing here – it seemed like you had been talking about A, but all of a sudden, here's this paragraph about B! Can you help your reader understand how this paragraph should fit in?" The student may need better transitions, or may have left out something important that will clarify matters, or he or she may see that the paragraph doesn't really belong. But let the writer make those decisions – if you say, "Take that one out!" you are making the writing decision for her/him.

Questions about sentence structure. How might you help your classmate learn to revise a sentence without changing it? Make up a similar sentence and carry out your revisions on it, explaining what the problem is, what options there are for revising it, and why you selected the option you did. Offer several different options, not just one, so that the writer sees that he/she has many choices.

Questions about word choice. Ask why the writer chose the word; tell what the word means to you and why it seems odd to you in this context. You could say, for example, "In your opening paragraph, I wonder how you chose the word 'bellicose.' When I read this word, I think of someone who is aggressive and warlike; is that what you meant?"

Look for patterns

clarity the most by considering. . .” or “The three areas that gave me the most trouble as a reader were. . . .”

Refer the writer to other resources: As a peer reviewer, no one expects you to be the expert on all issues related to writing. If you sense that there is a problem with the writing but are unsure, feel free to refer your classmate to a handout from class, a chapter from one of our texts, the Writing Studio Web site, or the course instructor. It is particularly helpful to point out several places in the paper where the error/problem occurs, and then let the writer try to resolve the issue using the resources you suggest.

Emphasize the fact that you are just one reader: Keep in mind for yourself, and emphasize for the writer, that you are just one a reader; consider prefacing your comments with phrases such as, “As one reader. . .” or “From my perspective. . .” You are not offering the definitive summary of what does and does not work in the paper.

*from Julie A. Reynolds and Vicki Russell, *Can You Hear Us Now?: A comparison of peer review quality when students give audio versus written feedback*, *Writing Across the Curriculum Journal*, vol. 19 (2008), pp. 29-44)s