

# Introduction to Peer Review

## Peer Review

### What is peer review?

Peer review is a “process by which peers read and respond to writing.” It is commonly used in first-year college writing courses.

### Why do peer review?

Peer review has several purposes:

- ⊙ To aid student writers in improving the success of their drafts by “testing” them on fellow students who act as reviewers and offer feedback.
- ⊙ To learn more about the topic, research, and/or the writing process through conversation and the exchange of ideas between writers and readers.
- ⊙ For developed drafts, peer review helps writers achieve a more thoughtful version of their text

### When do I do peer review?

Peer review can be done after a first (early) draft, or after a paper has been revised at least once (developed draft).

### What are some common practices for early drafts (invention drafts, discovery drafts)?

The goal for writers of early drafts is to capture ideas and transcribe them in a written format that makes sense to readers. After writing the first draft, writers need to revise that first draft. One way to help with revision is by asking “big picture” questions, which can help clarify the writing.

- 1) Who is the audience?
- 2) What is the main idea?
- 3) What information does the reader need to know about an idea for it to make sense?
- 4) Are examples needed?
- 5) Is evidence or support needed?
- 6) Is the topic appropriate to the writing task? Does it need to be more general? More focused?
- 7) Are the main points of the draft organized in a logical way?

### Tips for reviewing early drafts:

- ⊙ Number the sentences in each paragraph, and then number each paragraph, and refer to the numbers when responding (“Paragraph 2, line 6 – what do you mean here?”)
- ⊙ Thoughtful, narrative comments that are specific in nature are most useful for writers
- ⊙ Over-commenting on details of language or writing style can be confusing and counterproductive
- ⊙ Don’t have a friend review your writing. Instead, find a more objective reviewer who can give more constructive feedback

### What are some common practices to follow for developed drafts?

The goal for writers of developed drafts is to refine the main points to be emphasized in the paper. Some questions that should be addressed through review are:

- 1) What is the author’s (paragraph) topic sentence, (essay) thesis or central organizing idea?
- 2) If it is a persuasive paper, what claim is the author making?
- 3) Is there adequate support? (minor details)
- 4) Is source material correctly cited and integrated into the draft? (research paper)
- 5) Do some areas of the draft need more explanation and/or definition?
- 6) Does the writer’s language flow or do some areas seem difficult to understand?
- 7) Does the tone of the draft match the assignment and/or audience?

**Tips for reviewing developed drafts:**

- ⊙ (#1) Rephrase the author's thesis into your own words (helps check for clarity)
- ⊙ (#2) Identify the claim being made in the paper (highlight it, mark it, etc)
- ⊙ (#4) Locate any "orphan" quotations that are not connected to sentences (research paper)
- ⊙ (#5) Read the draft normally and mark any places that cause difficulty (words, phrases, etc)
- ⊙ (#6) Read the draft aloud, point out awkward passages, and identify for the writer if the problem is with usage or if it is a grammar problem
- ⊙ (#7) 'Audience' determines the level of written language that should be employed, so be sure to check pronoun usage (first, second, third person). Check for slang or casual language

**What are the benefits or advantages of doing peer review?**

- ⊙ Students can ask each other questions face-to-face and provide feedback on those questions
- ⊙ Ideas, arguments, sources and opinions can be clearly seen and discussed
- ⊙ Engaging learners in group peer response activities requires students to negotiate meaning and enables learners to gain additional practice in the target language (Liu & Hansen)

At the graduate level, some students viewed peer review response activities as beneficial because (1) reading their own drafts to peers helped them see their papers more clearly and (2) reading others' papers helped them compare their writing with others and learn new ideas (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994)

**What are some disadvantages of doing peer review?**

- ⊙ Limited class time for discussion (opt for online review or an extra class session)
- ⊙ Comments have to be written by hand
- ⊙ Handwritten comments can be hard to interpret (hard to understand or read > type out)
- ⊙ Peer review can be time-consuming (keep students focused on the task, and set time limits)
- ⊙ If student writers do not provide fully developed drafts for the peer review session, review may be severely limited in their ability to provide useful feedback

**How do I select peer reviewers?**

Friends are not the best peer reviewers. A good reviewer should be honest in giving feedback to fellow writers. A review that isn't honest isn't helpful. In addition to being dependable and thoughtful, the three C's of good review are that peers be:

- 1) Critical – be objective, but not harsh in your feedback.
- 2) Constructive – be helpful. If you know well about a specific area or topic, write what you know
- 3) Considerate – give the type of feedback that you would want to receive

**Things to remember about responding to other's writing**

- ⊙ Do not agree or disagree with the writer's opinion (be neutral). Try to focus on the writing and the way that the author expresses his/her ideas, not on the author or on ways the author's beliefs differ from your own
- ⊙ Do not convert the writer to any particular viewpoint
- ⊙ Do not argue with the writer about points in the text
- ⊙ Use separate paper for numerous comments
- ⊙ Writing in a class is essentially public writing

**References**

- Liu, J. and Hansen J. G. (2005) *Peer Response in Second Language Writing*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press
- Rollinson, P. (2005) Using peer feedback in the ESL writing class. *ELT Journal*, Vol. 59(1) OUP
- Trim, M. (2007) *What Every Student Should Know About Peer Review*. Pearson-Longman

## Peer Review - Instructions

### Instructions for face-to-face peer review

1. Bring both the original paragraph or essay and a copy of it to class.
2. Choose a partner(s)
3. Exchange the copy with a partner
4. Sit face to face with a partner or in a group
5. Agree who is the first reviewer. If you are not the first reviewer, be prepared to react to your partner's comment and stop reading here.

### If you are the first reviewer, proceed reading the following instructions:

1. Read your partner's essay once thru to get the general feeling for the topic (3')
2. On the second reading, begin to discuss the essay.
3. Please give very specific comments to the questions following these instructions.  
Always begins with a positive comment
4. Then, be more critical (honest) so as to help your partner improve his/her paper

### To discuss face-to-face (paragraph – 5'; essay – 12'), please do the following:

You should discuss the essay orally with your partner face-to-face. Follow these steps:

- 1) Read the questions and respond orally one by one
- 2) Listen to the response from your partner before you give your answer to the next question
- 3) Answer all the questions. If you have no comment for any question, just say "No comment for #X."

**Reminder:** All discussions should take place in English.

As you review your partner's paper, remind him/her to do the following:

- 1) Take notes of all face-to-face discussion on an A4 sheet, and
- 2) Write his/her name and date on the top of the paper (e.g. Joe Smith, 11MAR).
- 3) Your partner should take home the notes after the class and consider your comments to redraft her/his essay.
- 4) When the reviewing is finished, give the original paper and notes to the writer

**You:** At home (or in class there is enough time, you should respond to your partner's comments (the reviewer) about your paper by revising your paper.

Finally, in the next class/session, submit the following: (1) a copy of the notes written on the A4 sheet, (2) the first draft, and (3) the second draft.

<b>Peer Review – Questions for paragraphs</b>
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**Read the paragraph, and then answer the questions.**

**General Questions:**

1. What did you like best in the paragraph?
2. Did you enjoy reading the paragraph, or did you find it hard to follow the ideas?.
3. Is there any part in the paper that was confusing to you? If yes, point to the section and ask your partner to explain it to you.

**Title**

4. Is the title engaging? If not, suggest a new title.

**Hook and Topic sentence**

5. Do you think the hook is interesting? Explain why/why not.
6. What is the topic sentence?
7. Is the topic sentence clear?
8. Do you have any suggestions to improve the topic sentence? Be specific.

**Support**

9. Are the major points clearly identified?
10. Do the minor details adequately support the major points and the topic sentence?
11. Are there any parts of the paragraph that do not support the topic sentence and should be omitted? If yes, identify the part and ask your partner to remove or revise it.

**Conclusion**

12. Is the concluding sentence appropriate?
13. Does it rephrase the topic sentence in an interesting manner? If not, suggest how to make it more effective.

**Content**

14. Is the paper content relevant to the main topic?

**Organization**

15. Is the paragraph logically developed? Does it flow from least-to-most important?

**Cohesion**

16. Are the sentences connected well with transition signals or time markers?

**Vocabulary**

17. Are the words strong, clear and effective? If no, please give suggestions

**Grammar**

18. Are there inaccuracies? If yes, locate them; advise your partner to correct them

**Capitalization, Omissions, Punctuation and Spelling (COPS)**

19. Are there any mistakes in these areas? Point them out!

<b>Peer Review – Questions for essays</b>
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**Read the essay, and then answer the questions.**

**General Questions:**

1. What did you like best in the essay, and why?
2. Did you enjoy reading the essay, or did you find it hard to follow the ideas?.
3. Is there any part in the essay that was confusing to you? If yes, point to the paragraph section and ask your partner to explain it to you.

**Title**

4. Is the title engaging? If not, suggest a new title.

**Introduction and thesis statement**

5. Is there a hook? Is the hook is interesting? Explain why/why not.
6. Are the introduction parts (hook, limiting sentence, thesis) present in the introduction clear and linked well?
7. Is the thesis statement and map clear, focused, and relevant to the main topic? If not, suggest how they can be made more effective.
8. Do you have any suggestions to improve the topic sentence? Be specific.

**The Body: supporting points and details**

9. Does the first body paragraph contain a topic sentence, major support, and minor details, and a transition sentence?
10. How has the writer developed each paragraph? Has he/she used examples, quotations, facts or statistics? If not, suggest what details can be used.
11. Are the major points clearly identified?
12. Do the minor details adequately support the major points and topic sentence?
13. Are there any parts of the paragraph that do not support the topic sentence and should be omitted? If yes, identify the part and ask your partner to remove or revise it.
14. Answer 9-13 for the remaining body paragraphs.

**Conclusion**

15. Is the concluding sentence appropriate? Does it rephrase the topic sentence in an interesting manner? Does it give a summary or general statement? If not, suggest how to make it more effective.
16. Does the final sentence present a prediction, suggestion or quotation?
17. Generally, is the essay convincing and enjoyable to read? Why or why not?

**Content**

18. Is the essay a relevant and adequate answer to the task? If not, suggest how to make the content more relevant and adequate to the main topic.

**Organization**

19. Are all the paragraphs logically developed and organized? Has the writer used appropriate transitions to signal clearly different paragraphs? Is each body

paragraph successively stronger in emphasis, flowing from least-to-most important?

### **Cohesion**

20. Are the sentences within the body paragraphs connected well with transition signals or time markers? If not, show the paragraph and the inappropriate connective, and suggest appropriate connectives.

### **Vocabulary**

21. Are there any words that could be replaced so that the ideas become clearer, stronger and more effective? If no, please point at them and give suggestions to replace.

### **Grammar**

22. Are there any grammatical inaccuracies? If yes, please point them out and advise your partner to correct them

### **Capitalization, Omissions, Punctuation and Spelling (COPS)**

23. Are there any mistakes in these areas? Point them out!

### **Useful language expressions to help with partner discussion**

**To express your compliments, you can use these sentences to start:**

I like the part where...

I'd like to know more about...

I think your main idea is...

You used some powerful words, like...

I like the way you described...

I like the way you explained...

Your writing made me feel...

**As a writer, you can ask these questions to your reviewer:**

What did you learn from my writing?

What do you want to know more about?

What part doesn't make sense?

Is there a part I should throw away?

Can you tell me what my main idea is?

Did I use some words I need to change?

What details can I add?

**Here are more suggestions to comment and suggest as a reviewer:**

What is your favorite part?

What part are you having trouble with?

I was confused in the part about...

Could you leave this part out because...

Could you combine some sentences?

What do you plan to do next?

## What is it and why do it?

**Peer review** is “a process by which peers read and respond to writing.” It has two purposes.

- ⊙ Purpose 1: to help improve first/late drafts.
- ⊙ Purpose 2: To learn more about the topic, research, and/or the writing process through conversation and the exchange of ideas between writers and readers.

## Advantages

### Why use peer review?

- ⊙ Peers provide useful feedback
- ⊙ Writers can and do revise effectively based on feedback
- ⊙ It is different from teacher feedback (formal vs. informal)
- ⊙ Improves critical thinking skills
- ⊙ Writing for an ‘audience’ is empowering
- ⊙ It encourages peer collaboration where meaning is negotiated
- ⊙ Quicker turnover time between finishing and writing
- ⊙ Higher density of feedback

## Disadvantages

- ⊙ Takes time
- ⊙ Pre-training is needed to make it profitable
- ⊙ Hard to persuade students
- ⊙ Factors (age, level) may constrain students
- ⊙ Teacher issues with classroom authority

## Differences in peer review of Early drafts v. Developed drafts

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|---|---|
| ⊙ First draft                             | ⊙ Has been revised at least once                      |
| ⊙ Checklist for revision                  | ⊙ Reviewer needs to be specific                       |
| ⊙ Purpose > improve writing effectiveness | ⊙ Ideas, arguments, sources and opinions are viewed 😊 |
| ⊙ Writing = topic learning                | ⊙ Peer reflection 😊                                   |
| ⊙ Can ask questions 😊                     | ⊙ Time-consuming 😊                                    |
| ⊙ Can provide explanations 😊              |   |
| ⊙ Time is limited 😊                       |   |
| ⊙ Handwritten comments                    |   |

## First-draft questions

1. Who is my audience?
2. What is the main idea I want to convey?
3. What information does the my reader need to know about my idea for it to make sense?
4. Do I need examples?
5. Do I need evidence or support for any claims?
6. Have I selected a topic that is appropriate to my writing task? Does it need to be more general? More focused?
7. Are my points organized in a logical way?

## Selecting Peer Reviewers

Proper (1) group setup and  
(2) procedures can alleviate problems

### Issues:

- ⊙ Group size (2's, 3's\* or 4's)
- ⊙ Number of drafts to be written
- ⊙ Evaluation procedures

### Three C's:

1. Critical
2. Constructive
3. Considerate