JACOBSON CENTER

PEER REVIEW GUIDE

WHAT IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is written for a variety of instructors, including those not currently using peer review but wanting to and those currently doing so but are dissatisfied with the results or want to try something new. In this guide we offer advice and guidance on peer review along with actual examples of and procedures for several approaches to peer review.

INTRODUCTION

An overview of why you should include peer review along with best practices for peer review.
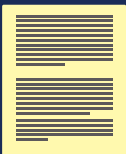
CRITERIA, MODELING, & GUIDANCE

A discussion of what criteria help make peer review successful along with how to model and guide peer reviews.

PEER REVIEW PROCEDURES

An overview of the procedures for doing both in-class and online peer review, accompanied by links for worksheets to use in your course.

FURTHER RESOURCES

A list of reading materials and additional ideology to support peer review in the classroom, along with a compendium of links to example peer review worksheets for students.

WANT MORE RESOURCE?

If you have any questions or concerns or need additional assistance with peer review, please do not hesitate to contact the Jacobson Center. We are happy to work with you to implement a successful peer review component in your course.

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Introduction: The Case for Peer Review

Students have many opportunities to receive feedback on their writing, but they often rely primarily on their professors to tell them what is working or not working with an essay. However, research has shown that feedback provided by peers can be beneficial and improve the quality of the final draft (Baker, 2016). In fact, peer review is mutually beneficial – providing critical feedback helps improve the reviewer's own writing as they become more attentive to the issues they notice in each other's work (Baker, 2016; Fallahi et al., 2006; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Yalch et al., 2019).

In addition, peer review also provides opportunities for students to participate more fully in the feedback process. Without peer review, students may view feedback as one-sided: instructors provide comments, students make changes. When they produce feedback themselves, they may see process as more dynamic.

The benefits of peer review are mediated by the implementation of peer review. In order for peer review to be effective, it must be done in a way that it is clear, structured, and purposeful.

In addition to improving writing, learning to provide effective, critical feedback helps to build skills needed to succeed outside of school. Peer review helps students develop higher order writing skills and critical thinking skills (Gunersel, et al., 2008; Macpherson, 2006).

FOR SUCCESSFUL PEER REVIEW, STUDENTS MUST:

- Believe that their peers' feedback is useful and reliable.
- Know from the beginning of the writing process that peer feedback will be included.
- Be able to interpret and use the feedback in their revisions (Lam, 2010).

To help ensure successful peer review, instructors should:
- Provide and discuss the pedagogical justification, the benefits, and the purpose of peer review with students at the beginning of the drafting process.
- Provide clear criteria and guidance for peer review.
- Devote class time to discussing the criteria and the purpose of peer review (note that this does not mean you have to do peer review during class time, merely that you need to discuss the actual process of peer review and the criteria students should use in their evaluation of their peers' writing).
- Schedule peer review in a way that allows students the chance to revise their writing prior to submitting the paper for a grade.
- Set the expectation that students will incorporate peer feedback into their revisions
- Provide students models of feedback

Criteria, Modeling, & Guidance

Just as with other skills taught in the classroom, peer review must also be taught. Students may have little to no experience with providing feedback on writing. There are various models for teaching the peer review/feedback process to students (Baker, 2016; Gunersel, et al., 2008; Lam, 2010), but all make use of certain features. All successful models work by fostering trust and responsibility among students, creating both formal and informal spaces for peer review, providing ample time to review and incorporate feedback, and modeling feedback. In other words, successful peer review requires training. This training should include criteria for reviewing papers, modeling the peer review process, and support and guidance throughout the process.

CRITERIA

There are several different ways to provide students with the criteria you want them to use when evaluating and providing feedback to peers. Some instructors use a handout or worksheet with a series of questions that students answer to help them with the peer review (e.g. does the paper have a thesis? What is it? Write it here). Other instructors provide rubrics. Some include the criteria in a lecture or PowerPoint. Regardless of how you communicate the criteria to your students, it is imperative that you give students criteria for evaluating and providing feedback on writing. Your criteria should make mention of what you would like students to focus on. For many readers, low-order (local) issues, such as grammar and punctuation mistakes, are easy to identify and comment on. However, this is the least useful type of feedback for writers. High-order (global) issues, such as argument structure and cohesion, are harder for readers to identify and comment on, but are the source of the most useful feedback. Students may be unaware of the distinction and may provide feedback that is less useful to the author. Make sure your criteria specify what issues you want students to focus on.

MODELING

Modeling the type of feedback you would like students to give is the most effective way to improve peer review. You can model in several ways. One is to provide students with an example paper that you have given feedback on. You can then go through the feedback with the class. Another method is to provide feedback on the first draft of the paper. Each student then sees the instructor feedback and can use it as a model for their own feedback on peers' papers.

GUIDANCE

Guidance on peer review can take many forms - detailed worksheets, guiding questions, modeling, etc. It is helpful to remind students to focus on global issues (i.e. organization, argument structure) before working on grammar and lower order items. One simple way to provide guidance is to check in with students during peer review. If it is in-person, simply stopping by the group and asking how it is going can be sufficient. If it is online, you can open their essays once and while. If you notice feedback is not happening or is off track, a quick comment/email to the group can help guide them back on track.

Doing Peer Review

IN-CLASS MODEL

STARTING A PEER REVIEW EXERCISE

In order for peer review to be successful, students need to understand your grading criteria, what you value, and how you will read their drafts. When peer review is unproductive, it is because students are not sure what they should be doing, are not confident in their ability to offer suggestions, and/or do not know what the instructor wants. By using the process detailed below, students gain agency over their own writing and rewriting process, while also gaining the skills and confidence to offer suggestions to peers.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR PEER REVIEW

To mitigate these issues, you may want to spend the first three weeks of the semester doing short mock assignments; this allows students to write no-risk drafts by which they can gauge their strengths and weaknesses. For example, the students read a text, write a two page analysis, and then bring their papers to class. As a class, workshop an example analysis - preferably one you have reworked to evenly distribute the amount of poor, good and excellent writing. Then divide the the students into groups and ask them to find three specific things that work well and three specific suggestions. Emphasize the word "specific," as students will often read a peer's paper and offer general comments, such as, "It's well written," or "It needs more analysis." The groups must point to the exact paragraphs and sentences when stating their opinions.

NEXT STEPS IN PEER REVIEW

After the class has had approximately 20 minutes to review the paper, go around the room and have each group give their feedback. Then, hand out the model essay you just reviewed with your notes typed in the margins so that the students can see where they did and did not align with your reading. These notes are valuable because often, students will think a particular passage is too tangential while you think it is a model for in depth analysis; or, students will praise a passage that you think is incomplete. Finally, for homework, have the students reread their drafts in light of the workshop and send you a reflection paper on what they did well and what they need to work on. This process is helpful for three reasons: it allows students to experientially understand all the items listed on your grading rubric; it helps them become autonomous writers and editors, freeing them from dependence on instructor feedback; and it demonstrates the difference between helpful and unhelpful feedback.

THE FIRST "REAL" ESSAY

Complete this process three times before you get to the first graded essay. When you transition to the first "real" essay, hold individual conferences with each student to review their rough drafts. After the individual conference, give students a week to make their revisions; then, schedule a peer review session (groups of three). This extensive foundation-laying helps during the first peer review session, as the students have had significant experience making connections between a generalized standard and a specific example rather than relying exclusively on your comments/judgements. It also enhances the student's skills and confidence in determining what is strong, what needs work, and how to articulate effective feedback for any paper, including their own.

LINKS

In-Class Peer Review Student Handout
In-Class Peer Review Model (Google doc version)

Doing Peer Review

ONLINE MODEL 1

WHY ONLINE? WHY ASYNCHRONOUS?

We often conceive of peer review taking place during class time with students frequently working in pairs or small groups. One alternative to in-class peer review is to use online writing groups that review members' papers outside of class asynchronously.

This has several benefits. The first is that it frees up more classroom time for instruction. Outside the initial instruction on how to provide feedback, the majority of the peer review takes place outside of class and more in-class time can be devoted to content. The second is that it more closely models how people provide feedback in the real world. Rarely do we meet with others to have them read our writing. Instead we usually share a document with them and they give us feedback asynchronously. Third, the timeframe for providing feedback can be longer than the hour or so that in-class peer review allows for. With peer review taking place online, students have more time to read and provide thoughtful feedback.

ONLINE WRITING GROUPS

Divide the class into groups of 3 to 5 students. There must be a minimum of three students as this allows each student to have two people providing feedback. Having multiple sources of feedback is beneficial as they may notice different issues and when they concur on an issue, the writer is more likely to make the revision. Capping the group at five helps control the workload management for the students in the group.

These groups stay the same all semester and are responsible for providing feedback on the papers in their group throughout the term. You can create new groups for each paper, but using the same group over the length of the semester helps build trust in the group. Trust and respect are essential for successful peer review.

CREATE A GOOGLE FOLDER

Create a shared google drive folder for the group with subfolders for each paper they will be required to give feedback on. For example, if a class writes three papers that they must provide feedback on, there are three folders, one for each paper.

By creating the folder yourself you ensure that you and all group members have access to the folder and the papers therein. This is important so that you can monitor student feedback and provide a grade if you are grading the peer review process.

POSTING, FEEDBACK, & GRADING

Require students to post a draft of their paper to their online writing group and to provide feedback by a certain date. Instructors can have students post their second draft a week after they receive instructor feedback on their first draft. This ensures that the second draft is different than the first draft and students have a model of appropriate feedback. Instructors should require all comments to be completed at least 48 hours before the due date of the next draft. This ensures that students have enough time to incorporate peer feedback before the next draft's due date.

To facilitate the idea of feedback as a conversation between reviewers and writers, require students to respond to substantive feedback on their paper. Instruct students that that if they choose not to make a change, that should they reply to the comment requesting the change with an explanation as to why they are not making the changes.

If you are grading the peer review process, please see the example below.

Doing Peer Review

ONLINE MODEL 1 CONTINUED

TIPS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE ONLINE WRITING GROUP PEER REVIEW

- Peer review should take place after students have seen feedback from the instructor. This helps to model the type of feedback you would like students to give.
- Explicitly discuss feedback. Provide instruction on the different types and levels of feedback (e.g. editing vs revising level feedback).
- If you are grading peer review, go over the rubric you will use.
- If you are using Google Drive (highly recommend), be sure that:
  - Students upload documents, not PDFs.
  - Students use the comment feature and do not make direct changes to the paper.
  - Students do not delete or resolve comments when done, and instead make the changes in a different document (you will want to see the comments in order to grade the peer review).
    - If comments are deleted, you can recover them by using the comment history (the speech bubble right next to the share button).

SUMMARY OF THE PROCESS

- Students work in groups of 3-5.
- They post their draft to the shared Google drive folder for their group.
- They make their comments no later than 48 hours before the next draft is due (to allow the author time to incorporate feedback).
- They should make ~3 comments per page (this is guideline, not an absolute, as some pages may have more comments than others).
- They reply to some of the comments on their paper.
- They do not comment on mechanics, grammar, etc.
- All comments must be content based, focusing on higher order issues, such as organization, cohesion, etc.
- The peer review is graded using a rubric. The instructor reviews the rubric with the students in class prior to the peer review.
- The instructor models the kinds of comments they want from the students in the feedback they give on the first draft. If they choose not to provide feedback on the first draft, they can provide examples of good and bad feedback.

LINKS

Online Writing Group Example Rubric
Online Writing Groups_Model (Google Doc Version)

Doing Peer Review

ONLINE MODEL 2

STEP 1

- Ask each student to share their second rough draft with you and their two group members.
- Ask students to name their doc as their name and then draft # 2: "Student X_Draft 2." This helps to avoid 15 versions of "Second rough draft." It also makes it easier to navigate when checking student's essays and comments.

STEP 2

- Each student makes a copy of their peer's paper.
- Each student then renames that copy with their name and the name of the author: "Student X_Student Y."
- Students then share the new doc with the instructor and the author.
- Each student systematically reviews each essay in their group by reading and then commenting on one paragraph at a time (see **In-Class Peer Model** for a detailed description of this process**).**

Step two allows instructors to review students' comments; it also allows each student to review two separate drafts rather than one cluttered with two comment threads.

Knowing that an instructor will review the comments deters students from only writing a few superficial comments. You can inform students that if they truly do think everything (or almost everything) is in great shape, that they should take the time to comment on what they think is working best and articulate why these passages are particularly strong.

Set a date and time for when the feedback should be finished and ask students to write "Finished" at the top of the first page so that you and the author know the feedback is complete.

LINKS

Online Model 2 (Google Doc Version)

Further Resources

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EXAMPLE PEER REVIEW WORKSHEETS

These are example worksheets you can give to students to help facilitate peer review. Links to some of these are included with procedures discussed in this guide.

Example 1
Example 2
Example 3A
Example 3B
Example 4
Example 5