How to Use
Writing Workshops in Class

Resources for Faculty

Peer response is the process in which students exchange constructive criticism on their work to help each other hone critical reading and writing skills.
Peer response is particularly helpful in writing and speaking intensive courses.

Contents:

Benefits of Peer Response

- Providing a **wider audience** for student-writers
- Teaching students to **critically analyze** their own writing and others' writing
- Motivating multiple drafts and **substantial revisions**
- Familiarizing students with the format, style, criteria, and **expectations of writing in the discipline** studied
- Promoting **active** learning
- Building classroom **community**
- Modeling the interpersonal, interactive, and group problem-solving nature of most **workplace writing**

Options for Peer Response

Determining your **goals and objectives** for using peer feedback in a class will help you determine which methods to use. Do you want students to be dialoguing about the **content and ideas** at much deeper levels to develop their points stronger? Do you want them learning about **structure and organization** from each other's knowledge? Do you want them paying attention to **grammar** or ignoring it? You must first define your goals for the process and then choose a method that will most effectively meet them.

One-on-One – This format of peer response limits the range of responses each student receives, but provides space for much deeper and personal evaluation.

Peer Response Groups – Groups are good for getting a variety of opinions and perspectives, but don't allow for as much depth. Groups should remain small and work best with 3-5 members.

SAW Mentor Facilitation – A SAW mentor assigned to your class can meet one-on-one with students or run small peer feedback groups to ensure that they run smoothly.

Exchanging papers in advance – Students can share papers with their group through WebCT or "ella" message boards, e-mail, or distribution of copies in class. This option allows students to thoroughly consider their peers' work and come to class prepared with comments.

Reading papers aloud in small groups– Students can spend the beginning of each peer response group reading their papers out loud, and bring extra copies for the others to read along and write down comments. This option takes less time and advanced preparation, but doesn't allow students to evaluate each other's work as deeply. This only works well with short (2-3 page) papers, or too much time is taken for reading aloud.

Regardless of whether you choose to use these formats **during a class period** or as homework **outside of class,** make sure your **goals and objectives** are clear and explicit for students.

The Most Effective Peer Response

Peer response is only effective if the writer actively incorporates the new ideas into their revision/editing process. Sometimes it is difficult to move from a critique (e.g., these arguments do not flow) to a concrete way to improve (e.g., use the first lines of the new paragraph to close the last idea and show how it relates to the next argument). **The following are a few possible strategies for helping students use peer response to improve their next draft:**

- Ask students to **summarize** in writing the feedback they received and **jot down the changes they plan to make** in their upcoming revision.
- Ask students to submit a **cover memo** along with their finished writing in which they **explain their new revisions** in response to the reviews they received.
- Ask students to fill out a feedback form on their **own** draft. Then they **compare their self-analysis with the peer response they received** and make plans for the next round of revisions.
- Ask students to use the feedback forms as a **checklist** before turning in their next drafts.
- Ask students to discuss the feedback they received in meetings with the professor to help **develop strategies for improvement**.

Running an In-Class Workshop on Peer Response

Even with a response form in hand, students will not necessarily know how to respond to peer drafts. Most students need to be taught how to give constructive, useful feedback. One approach:

1. **Hand out copies** of a sample completed assignment (perhaps written by a student in the previous semester).
2. **Discuss** the criteria on the feedback form so that the language becomes meaningful to everyone.
3. **Show** how you would apply the criteria by "thinking out loud" as you read the first paragraph of the paper.
4. Ask students to read the paper and **complete** the feedback form (alternatively, they can complete the form out of class).
5. **Discuss** the responses as a class.

Practice sessions are important for the success of peer review. They give you a chance to clarify the criteria and even aspects of the assignment if that proves necessary.

Student responses such as "This is good" or "This is bad" are **too general** to be helpful and don't give a writer enough information on how or what to improve. Show students how to go beyond generalities by **reinforcing appropriate and effective comments** as students offer them in discussion. Encourage them to specify what needs improvement and what works well.

One-to-One Peer Response Guidelines

1. Exchange your draft with another student.
2. Read the entire draft before commenting.
3. Write your comments on the back of the student's draft.
4. Write thorough responses to all of the questions below and (time permitting) follow up with a descriptive outline.

Questions for Peer Response:

1. What do you see as the main point/claim/assertion of the whole paper?
2. What are the subsidiary points? List them in the order they come.
3. Taking each reason in turn, what support or evidence or examples are given for it—or could be given?
4. What assumptions does the paper seem to make about topic or issue? That is, what does the essay take for granted?
5. What assumptions does the paper seem to make about the audience? That is, who or what kind of readers does the writer seem to be talking to; how are they most likely to react to the paper? How does the writer treat readers (e.g., enemies, friends, children, colleagues); what is the writer's stance toward the audience?
6. Is there sufficient analysis to convince you of the writer's argument(s)?
7. What do you like best about this draft?
8. What suggestions can you make for a stronger opening or conclusion, for the organization and transitions?

Descriptive Outline Response:

Developed by composition and rhetoric scholar Kenneth Bruffe, this procedure focuses on **analyzing meaning** (what an author *says*) **and function** (what a sentence or paragraph *does* rhetorically) **of discourse**. Number each paragraph and write a corresponding "says" statement and a "does" statement. For example:

First Paragraph
Says: that radical action is necessary to slow down the process of global warming
Does: sets the scene; introduces physical and emotional urgency
Second Paragraph:
Says: that many people do not take the problem seriously enough
Does: appeals to reader's social conscience
Third Paragraph:
Says: that radical action means banning and boycotting certain products and companies; that the main argument against taking radical action is economic
Does: Defines radical action in this context; counters one of the prevalent arguments against taking radical action

Etc.

Adapted from Sorcinelli, Mary Deane; Peter Elbow (Eds.), *Writing to Learn:Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines* (New Directions for Teaching and Learning, No. 69). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 1997. Also adapted from Elbow, Peter, and Pat Belanoff. *Sharing and Responding*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw Hill. 1995.

Procedures for Response Groups on Persuasive Essays

Preliminary Activities

1) Distribute copies of the author's paper to the other members of the group.

2) The author reads the draft aloud while the others in the group follow along silently (unless the papers have been distributed, read, and given written comments in advance).

3) As the author reads, all members of the group identify the following elements in the essay being read:

Thesis: Circle the sentence that most clearly conveys the thesis.
First Supporting Argument: Put a box around the paragraph(s) that contain this argument.
Second Supporting Argument: If the paper contains a second supporting argument, box this, too.
Objections: Put a bracket in the ***left*** margin around any lines that contain an objection.
Responses: Put a bracket in the ***right*** margin around any lines that contain a response. Unclear or problematic words, clauses, or sentences should be underlined.

4) Consider these questions:

Is the thesis sufficiently clear and focused?
Does the supporting argument(s) actually justify the thesis?
Does the objecting argument show a flaw in the supporting argument, or does it reject the thesis?
Is there an adequate response to the objecting argument, and what kind of response is it?

Response Activities

5) After the author is done reading the draft, the author should tell the group what areas on which she would like for them to address. Try to use this as an opportunity to get *specific* responses from the group, not general comments. Authors can ask about specific sections that they are unsure about, or they may focus their attention on a particular style, structure, or content issue that concerns them.

6) Readers respond in three ways:

a. First, each reader briefly addresses the author's concerns.

b. After each reader has done that, group members offer their own constructive comments.

c. On your copy of the draft, write down any comments you have for the author.

d. Limit your discussion of each draft to 20 minutes so that you have time for all. Return your comments to each author so that they may refer to them during revision.

Adapted from S. Pliner & E. Barnes, I-212 "Peer Mentoring: Theory and Practice" Handout, Mount Holyoke College, 2003.

Self-Directed Peer Review Guidelines

Check this sheet each time you review a fellow writer's work.

- Always begin by seeing if the writer has something he or she wants to know from you about the paper.
- Your role should be to assist your fellow writer in expressing her or his ideas. Don't get caught up in providing critical evaluations, and don't re-write the paper.
- Read as a reader, rather than as a critic. Describe how you react to the piece: if there's something you don't like or follow, say that, rather than "This is bad: of "This is wrong."
- Don't serve primarily as a proofreader. If you happen to notice a recurring error, point it out, but don't spend your time correcting typos and individual spelling, grammar, or punctuation problems.
- Remember that you always have something to offer: it needn't be in the form of advice; if the paper seems successful as is, your saying just that may matter a good deal (and may be as astute as any set of suggestions).

Key Questions:

- Can you identify the main idea (or ideas)?
- Do you find each idea in the paper engaging?
- Did you get lost somewhere along the way?
- Did you find yourself presented with points that had already been made clear to you?
- Do the style, diction, and point of view seem appropriate to the kind of idea that's being considered?
- Does the paper's structure allow evidence and information to be presented compellingly?
- Do you find yourself wanting points to be more thoroughly illustrated: Does the evidence seem to you inadequate to the point that's being made?
- Is too much evidence presented for points you are ready to accept? does the main point seem to you less interesting than the evidence that is used to support it?

Yale Writing Center, Yale University. http://www.yale.edu/bass/2peerreview.html (10 Nov 2006)

Sample Revision Worksheet

TITLE _____

AUTHOR _____

READER _____

Revision is the process of looking over what you have written and making substantial changes in such areas as organization, voice, argument, thesis, evidence, etc. Revision involves a careful rethinking of purpose and a reconsideration of audience. Think about the following questions as you revise or help another revise:

- Is the *purpose* of the writing clear in the first paragraph? (If not, why not?)

- Can you identify the *audience* for whom this is written? (Look for cues in the writing: tone, style, word choice, etc. Can a person off the street read and understand the material? If too technical, circle some of the too technical words)

- How is the paper *organized?* (Look for a pattern here: chronological, topical, logical, compare/contrast, etc. If there is a pattern, is there anything out of order?)

- Is *evidence* used to support generalizations? (Look for examples, specific details, concrete description, etc. Are all the examples supportive of the general statement?)

- Did the author summarize the *main point* of the paper in a sentence or two? (Is there a conclusion that does this?)

Comments and notes from the reader to the author:

Adapted from Fulwiler, Toby. *Teaching with Writing.* New York: Boynton Cook. 1986

Sample Revision Worksheet

Editor's Name_____
Author's Name_____

1) Is the main point of the paper clear? What is the main point?

2) What was most interesting about my paper? Be specific.

3) Were there any areas that were confusing, or could be improved? What were they?

4) Does the paper begin strongly? Does it grab your interest? Could it be improved?

5) How does it end? Is there enough closure? Does it seem abrupt? Does it summarize too much or not enough?

Sample Revision Worksheet

Author_____ Reviewer_____

The goals of peer review are 1) to help improve your classmate's paper by pointing out strengths and weaknesses that may not be apparent to the author, and 2) to help improve revision and editing skills.

INSTRUCTIONS
Read the paper(s) assigned to you twice, once to get an overview of the paper, and a second time to provide constructive criticism for the author to use when revising/editing. Respond to the questions below:

ORGANIZATION (10%)

1 Were the basic sections (Introduction, Conclusion, Literature Cited, etc.) adequate? If not, what is missing?
2 Did the writer use subheadings well to clarify the sections of the text? Explain.
3 Was the material ordered in a way that was logical, clear, easy to follow? Explain.

CITATIONS (20%)

4 Did the writer cite sources adequately and appropriately? Note any incorrect formatting.
5 Were all the citations in the text listed in the Literature Cited section? Note any discrepancies.

GRAMMAR AND STYLE (20%)

6 Were there any grammatical or spelling problems?
7 Was the writer's writing style clear? Were the paragraphs and sentences cohesive?

CONTENT (50%)

8 Did the writer adequately summarize and discuss the topic? Explain.
9 Did the writer comprehensively cover appropriate materials available from the standard sources? If no, what's missing?
10 Did the writer make some contribution of thought to the paper, or merely summarize data or publications? Explain.

Manoa Writing Program, University of Hawaii. http://www.mwp.hawaii.edu/resources/spanish300.htm (10 Nov 2006).

Sample Writing Assessment Rubric

THESIS
25-22
EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: Thesis is clear and adequately reflects the purpose of the assignment; evidence is relevant and adequately supports the thesis.
21-18
GOOD TO AVERAGE: Minor weakness in thesis and/or use of evidence (e.g., thesis somewhat ambiguous or vague or slightly off the topic; evidence sometimes irrelevant or inadequate to support all statements.)
17-11
FAIR TO POOR: Major weakness in thesis and/or use of evidence (e.g., thesis ambiguous or very vague or ignores the purpose of the assignment; evidence scanty or not related to the points under discussion).
10-5
VERY POOR: Absence of thesis and/or absence of relevant evidence.

ORGANIZATION
20-18
EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: Sequence of ideas (paragraphs) in the paper is clear, logical, and complete; paragraphs have topic sentences, transitions, and are internally coherent.
17-14
GOOD TO AVERAGE: Minor weaknesses in overall organizational pattern and/or paragraph structure (e.g., some irrelevant ideas/paragraphs included; some ideas omitted or not fully developed; some paragraphs with no major point).
13-10
FAIR TO POOR: Major weaknesses in organization and/or paragraph structure (e.g., frequent digressions; few transitions; serious omissions or underdevelopment).
9-7
VERY POOR: lack of overall organization and/or absence of coherent paragraphs (e.g., no explicit relationships among ideas in the paper; many one-sentence paragraphs, etc.).

VOCABULARY
20-18
EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: Vocabulary of sophisticated range; effective use of word/idiom choice and usage, word form mastery, appropriate register.
17-14
GOOD TO AVERAGE: Vocabulary shows adequate range; occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, and usage, *but meaning is not obscured.*
13-10
FAIR TO POOR: Vocabulary has limited range, frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage; *meaning **is** confused or obscured.*
9-7
VERY POOR: Vocabulary is essentially translation; clear projection from English.

LANGUAGE USE
25-22
EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: Good construction of sentences, including proper word order, referents, subject-verb agreement, parallel structure, modifier and clause placement; few errors of agreement, tense, number, articles, pronouns, prepositions.
21-18
GOOD TO AVERAGE: Minor weaknesses in grammar; few grammatical errors that, in the context of the essay, cause the reader some distraction; effective but simple constructions; several errors in agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions, *but meaning seldom obscured.*
17-11
FAIR TO POOR: Major weaknesses in grammar that cause the reader significant distraction; frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function; frequent errors of articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions; *meaning is confused or obscured;* reads like a translation from English.
10-5
VERY POOR: Poor grammar; virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules; dominated by errors; does not communicate.

MECHANICS
10-9
EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: Shows mastery of conventions of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, and accent marks.
8-7
GOOD TO AVERAGE: Occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, and accent marks, but *meaning is not obscured*.
6-5
FAIR TO POOR: Frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, and accent marks; *meaning **is** confused or obscured.*
4-2
VERY POOR: Shows no mastery of conventions; dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, and accent marks.

Manoa Writing Program, University of Hawaii. http://www.mwp.hawaii.edu/resources/spanish300.htm (10 Nov 2006).

Troubleshooting:
What to Do When Peer Response Isn't Working

Sometimes students need more prompting to participate fully in the feedback process. Here are a few techniques for making peer feedback more successful if students are not responding much at first:

- If free-form feedback is not getting much response, require that students work from a **list of specific questions or considerations** and say something about each one (sample handouts are available in this packet).
- Ask for one **student volunteer** in each small group to **mediate** the discussion, ask questions, and make sure everyone participates.
- Try running the feedback sessions **during class time** and participate, rotating among the groups.
- Require that students **hand in**, with their final draft, **write-ups** on both the feedback they received and how they used it to improve their next draft, and include this as part of their grade.

Sometimes when students aren't responding, they may need more than just prompting. They **may not fully understand how to give feedback**, or **not know what to look for in terms of structure, organization, and content** issues. Peer response is a fantastic opportunity to begin honing those skills, but more foundation might need to be laid first. In a case like this, consider:

- Bring a member of the Speaking, Arguing, and Writing Program (SAW) to your class and have them **present** on the topics of your choice, or require that students attend workshops held by SAW such as "constructing arguments."
- Have you had an **in-class workshop** on giving feedback yet? This can be more thorough and allow space for students to ask clarifying questions.
- Next semester, for long-term support, you may want to consider having a **SAW writing or speaking mentor** for your course. Online request forms are available at <**http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/programs/wcl/saw/faculty/mentor_form.shtml**>. A mentor can facilitate small group work, give in-class presentations on writing, speaking, and feedback skills, and work one-to-one with students who need further assistance.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Peer Response

- Require that students **hand in written peer response sheets and the original draft** along with their final drafts.
- Require that students **submit a cover memo** with their finished writing in which they note how specifically they revised in response to the peer reviews they received.
- Create an **assessment form** for peer writing groups. Sample questions might include: What has been most helpful about your peer response group? What suggestions do you have for making your group more effective? Do you think we should continue to use peer review? Why or why not?
- Facilitate a class **discussion** about the peer response process, using the same questions as above.
- Make **modifications** to the groups based on student suggestions.
- **Don't give up** if peer groups are not immediately effective. Students need time and guidance to learn how to respond to each other productively.

Adapted from Manoa Writing Program, University of Hawaii. http://www.mwp.hawaii.edu/resources.htm (10 Nov 2006). Also adapted from Virginia Tech Writing Program. http://www.ceut.vt.edu/onlineresources.html (10 Nov 2006).