



Improving Student Writing through Peer Review

Peer review is an active learning strategy with a number of benefits for learners. It focuses on the writing process, improves students' critical analysis skills, and allows them to improve their work before it is graded. Facilitate the peer review process online by using tools such as Blackboard, email, or the Peer Review Tool.

What is Peer Review?

Peer review is a learning strategy in which a student reviews another student's written work and provides feedback. Since students are asked to revise their work based on the feedback they receive, peer review puts the focus on the process of writing.

Peer editing generally refers to commenting on a paper's organization, tone, format, flow, grammar, punctuation, and so on. Peer review usually includes an examination of the content as well. When reviewing a paper for content, students assess factors such as a well-defined thesis statement, the depth to which the topic was adequately covered, assumptions and biases, and the strength of the paper's argument.

Benefits of Peer Review

Peer review is a student-centred, active learning strategy that increases student engagement in the course. More benefits of peer review are listed below.

Student authors:

- Refine their ideas as a result of the feedback they receive.
- Focus on writing as a process that emphasizes editing and revisions.
- Develop a better sense of audience.
- Improve their work before it's submitted for grading.
- Are motivated to produce high-quality work, since they know their peers will be critiquing it.

Student reviewers:

- Gain insights about their own work from reading other assignments.
- See other approaches to an assignment or perspectives of an issue.
- Become familiar with important aspects of the assignment as they use the rubric or criteria to perform the review.
- Improve their ability to read a paper critically.
- Strengthen their communication skills, especially in respect to critiquing and providing feedback.
- Gain knowledge of a wider variety of course topics.



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Peer Review in a Blended or Online Course

Consider facilitating the peer review process electronically through one of the following ways:

- Manage the process using file sharing, email attachments, or discussion forums.
- Organize the process online using software such as the Peer Review Tool, which makes it possible to implement peer review in large classes.
- Provide resource materials online, such as feedback forms and rubrics, samples of poor feedback and constructive criticism, guidelines as to how students will be evaluated, and writing resources.
- Incorporate informal peer feedback into a course through student blogs. This is a great way to increase interaction in a course.

Give Me an Example

Planning in advance will facilitate a smoother process. When structuring the peer review process, consider the following:

- Plan the steps in the process including due dates for each step. For example, you may have a deadline for the first submission, a deadline for student reviewers to get their feedback to the student author, and a due date for the final submission of the revised paper.
- Make sure you leave enough time for each step in the process.
- Decide what characteristics you want students to look for in each others' papers. Create a rubric or feedback sheet for student reviewers to use.
- Have a practice session with students. Critique work samples, using the rubric or feedback sheet for the assignment. Demonstrate constructive criticism; show poor feedback as well. Make the examples available online for future reference.
- Give students clear guidelines about what is expected from reviewers.
- Let students know how they will be evaluated on the feedback they give. You may decide to make it a graded assignment, or a credit assignment for completing it. By assigning marks to the review, students will realize that you value it.
- Tell students how to use the feedback they receive on their work.
- Decide how you will handle late or incomplete reviews. Student authors should not be penalized with less time to complete their assignment if they receive feedback later than other students. At times you or a Teaching Assistant may need to review a student's work, if the assigned student reviewer doesn't submit a review.

Following Up on Feedback from Reviewers

Decide how you will have student authors follow up on the feedback they receive. You may want to try one of the following suggestions:

- Student authors note each comment or suggestion they've received. They state whether or not they have accepted the suggestion, and provide a rationale for their decision. Then they include the revision, if applicable.
- Student authors include a summary of the feedback, looking for patterns in the comments. They briefly state how they revised their work as a result of the feedback.
- If more than one person has reviewed their work, student authors compile the comments in a short report, identifying similar comments from the reviewers. They include their revised work.

Other Considerations

- Decide on a standard format for the reviewers' comments. For example, if you want the authors' papers to retain formatting, you can have the reviewers attach their comments or a rubric at the end of the paper. If you want comments to appear next to the relevant text, students can insert comments throughout the document.
- Have student reviewers read a paper on a different topic from their own to limit plagiarism and expose them to a wider range of course topics.
- It takes time for students to develop skills in providing constructive criticism. Don't expect perfection the first time they try it. Peer review will be more effective if you use it three or four times over the term.

Where Can I Go for More Information?

1. Incorporating Peer Review

Good examples of negative comments and constructive criticism.

http://www.owc.umn.edu/Incorporating_Peer_Review.html?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7B29B4B9CD-5CF9-4794-BFEA-B33037CDB39F%7D

2. Peer Review

http://www.mwp.hawaii.edu/resources/peer_review.htm

3. Peer Review Tool

An online document management system designed to assist the peer review process.

<http://tlc.ucalgary.ca/projects/prt>

4. WISPR: Web-based Inquiry Search Process for Research in the Library

An interactive model that focuses on the research process.

<http://webapps2.ucalgary.ca/~commons/servlet/wispr/app?service=page/GENERIC-Home>