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# Peer Review: A Short Guide

Students can learn to become effective evaluators of each others' writing in the course of a semester. However, just as faculty who teach writing, students must be trained to do so. Without clear direction students will not likely be able to meet your course goals nor will they be able to focus on the types of commentary that encourage revision. It will probably take some time to train students to become effective evaluators, but in the end peer-review should save you time as a teacher and help students develop a much deeper understanding of rhetorical concepts. Moreover, the benefit of peer-review is not only to the student receiving comments from peers. The very process of commenting engages students in writing conventions at a deep cognitive level. Below is one way to think about organizing peer-review; there are many others as you will discover. The advice below is based off of having students take essays home to comment then discussing their comments in class. However, most of the advice is relevant if students are reading and commenting in class or even commenting on an online platform such as Google Docs.

## Before

1. The first thing students are going to need in order to discuss each others' essays is a vocabulary. They will need the words and phrases that identify the concepts you are teaching in your course. You might do this by giving students your rubrics and discussing them in class or by letting students develop their own language collaboratively.
2. Secondly, students will need to practice discussing other essays before they begin tackling their peers' essays. Using a rubric based on course outcomes, students can either practice on example essays (from past students for instance).
3. It is beneficial to either generate a list of workshop rules for students or have them read an article about peer-review and discuss it in class. Robertson's "'Is Anybody Listening?': Responding to Student Writing" and Straub's "Responding—Really Responding—to Other Students' Writing" are both good examples.
4. If you are going to use a separate sheet for students to write comments on, prepare your questions ahead of time.
5. Pick workshop groups. Most collaborative learning experts suggest 3-4 students in a group (3 is optimal).

## During

1. It is a good idea to assign roles to students in groups. Common roles are a *timekeeper*, a *recorder*, and a *task master*.
2. You will need to strike a balance between letting students work on their own and giving them direction. If you intervene too soon or too much as students are discussing essays, students will not learn how to discuss essays in process. On the other hand, they do need enough direction to learn how to do so productively. Wait before you intervene in the process. When you do, be clear and concise with your questions and directions.
3. As students are working, take time to teach them how to work collaboratively. Watch for good examples of collaboration and share them with the class.

## After

1. Find a way to make students accountable to each other and the process of peer-review. For example, you can have students report to you after the session, turn in an exercise, or turn in a homework assignment that demonstrates they have met your expectations for peer-review.
2. Establish a feedback loop in which students are able to have a dialogue with you about the peer-review process. You can do this with homework (such as a reflective journal) or have students write notes to you on the draft you put comments on, etc.