

Peer Review Guide



- **View yourself as a coach, not a judge.**
Think of yourself as a proposer of possibilities, not a dictator of revisions. It is the writer, after all, who will have to grapple with the task of improving the essay.
- **Make some descriptive comments.**
Not all comments need to be evaluative. Sometimes it's helpful just to describe your response. For example, if the writer's subject is disabilities, you might comment, "I think your point is that many adults are insensitive and patronizing when they encounter persons with physical disabilities."
- **Where possible, compliment the writer. Be specific.**
Vague compliments such as, "I liked your essay," sound insincere, and they aren't helpful. Point out specific successes. For example, you might mention, "your second paragraph contains a powerful example of insensitivity towards people with disabilities."
- **Link suggestions for improvement to the writer's goals.**
Criticism is constructive when it is offered in the right spirit. For example, you might advise the writer to put the most dramatic example last, where it will have the maximum impact on readers. Or you might suggest that a passage would gain power if abstractions were replaced with concrete details.
- **Tell the writer where you would like to hear more.**
When you indicate an interest in hearing more about a topic, the writer is often inspired to come up with useful and vivid details--such as, "this a bit of dialogue that perfectly illustrates just how patronizing some people can be toward those with physical disabilities."
- **Express interest in reading the next draft.**
When your interest is sincere, expressing it can be a powerful motivation for a writer.

Examples

Don't say . .

"This paragraph is terrific."

"This is a good analogy."

"You need to work on reorganizing this paragraph . . ."

"This paragraph isn't unified."

"You need to develop this more."

Do Say . . .

"I followed the ideas in this paragraph easily because . . ."

As I read your analogy, I understood the difference between two theories. The first is like x, and the second is like y.

"I got confused here because of . . ."

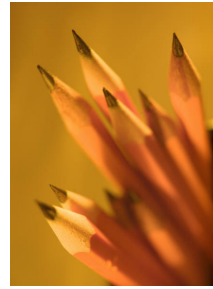
"How does x idea and y idea connect to each other?"

"As I read this I wanted to know more about x and y."

Peer Review Practices

More About

Doing **More About** for a draft lets the writer know what questions you have and what you're curious about. It's good for writers to know what readers want because often what we want to know are the things that will help us be convinced and satisfied.



Examples:

"I want to hear more about how the foster system works. When do kids enter?"

"I want to hear more about the different challenges with kids who age out in different areas. Do kids have it easier aging out in Ventura versus Oakland?"



Sayback

With **sayback** we're basically checking with the writer to see if what we understand the writer's draft to be saying is what the writer meant to say. This is also helpful for us as readers in figuring out what a piece of writing is saying.

To give a writer a **sayback** for his/her draft, read the whole thing, then try to sum up in a sentence or two what you feel the writer is getting at. Write your response in a mildly questioning tone that invites the writer to respond. Think of yourself as inviting the writer to restate and get closer to what he/she wants to say.

Examples:

"Are you saying overall that injustice has always existed and still exists?"

"Are you saying that injustice is usually about the majority oppressing the minority, like with Martin Luther King Jr.?"

"Are you saying overall that the fight against injustice starts within the minorities being oppressed?"

"Are you saying overall that injustice occurs when a government says it grants people rights but doesn't actually live up to its promise?"

Skeleton Feedback

Skeleton Feedback is a way to try and look at all the claims a draft is making and which evidence and examples are meant to support those claims. It doesn't worry about paragraphs so much as the claims wherever they fall. One claim may span several paragraphs.



To give **skeleton feedback**, read the whole draft first, then list the claims or ideas as they come to you in order. Don't worry about which is the most important, or which comes first in the paper. Just try to get all the big claims. Then, take one of those and go back through the draft to find all the examples and evidence the writer is using to try and support that claim. Repeat this for all the claims.

Where and Why



Where and Why feedback addresses the way an essay is arranged and what that arrangement accomplishes. Is the story told chronologically? Is a problem laid out prior to listing solutions? A writer might put paragraphs in different order for different reasons. It is like arranging furniture in a room. There could be several ways to arrange your room, but you'll have a reason for where you put each thing. You might want your desk by the light where you read. You might want your dresser in the closet so it is out of the way. Drafts are the same way--writers arrange their ideas in a certain way for a reason. Addressing the choices writers make when arranging their ideas helps them consider their intentions when putting forth their ideas.