

Peer-Response

Main takeaway:

Peer-response is a best practice in writing pedagogy across the disciplines because it requires students to think and talk about writing on a meta-cognitive level, thereby helping them become more effective writers themselves. Additional benefits of peer-response include that it encourages productive talk and helps build class community; encourages students to start early and write multiple drafts; facilitates revision; and shows writers how readers respond to their writing.

When the class is physically-distanced or in a hybrid or online environment, it's even more important to provide specific guidelines for peer-response, and to prepare students to read and respond to their peers' writing effectively. Developing specific guidelines for conducting peer-response means that this activity can more easily shift between in-person physically-distanced, hybrid, or online situations. Consider developing procedures that account for online situations; for example, build in the option for students to discuss the written feedback they've given to each other in an online Moodle forum or in a video conference.

It's important to give students enough time to complete peer-response, and to build in more flexible deadlines for peer-response happening in online spaces. Dedicating an entire physically-distanced in-person class period to peer-response is appropriate (students should bring their laptops to class). In hybrid or online situations, you could set the deadline for students to share their own writing on one day by 11:59pm, with completed peer-response worksheets for their peers due the next day at 11:59pm. **If conducting peer-response fully online, provide instruction to the class (via a video overview, synchronous conversation, or written document) on how to read and respond to peers' writing.**

Visiting the Writing Center is another kind of peer-response, so include a statement about the WC in your syllabus and talk with students about the benefits of working with a peer consultant. **The Writing Center will likely offer face-to-face and online sessions during Fall 2020. The Resource section of Moodle for this module includes two documents about The Writing Center you may want to share with students: "Writing Center Consultations" and "Writing Center Resources."**

Teach students to use "describe-evaluate-suggest" model for giving feedback

- Describe: say what you see as a reader
- Evaluate: explain how the text meets or doesn't meet evaluation criteria
- Suggest: offer concrete advice for improvement (Eli Review)

Three Common Peer-Response Worksheet Designs

Design #1 – Students create the worksheet

- Students write questions about their writing to which their peers respond
- Discourage yes/no questions like “Is this well-organized? Does my paper flow?”
- Encourage focused, goal-oriented, descriptive questions or suggestions like “Rephrase my thesis,” “Identify evidence that is persuasive/not persuasive and explain why it’s persuasive/not persuasive.”

Design #2 – Worksheet is the assignment’s evaluation criteria or rubric

- The evaluation criteria or rubric is the worksheet.
- Peers give feedback according to the evaluation criteria or rubric, given that the evaluation criteria reflect what students are practicing and what is important in any given assignment.
- Designing rubrics is discussed in a later module.

Design #3 - Professor creates the worksheet

- Use assignment goals, assignment evaluation criteria, and genre/disciplinary expectations to create questions.
- Avoid yes/no questions.
- Write focused, goal-oriented, descriptive questions like “Rewrite the thesis here and explain what is strong/weak about it. How could it be made stronger?” “Explain how the report does a good job addressing reader needs. Describe two ways the report could do a better job of this?” “Which use of evidence is the strongest? Explain why this use of evidence is strong. Where is evidence lacking?”

Write Explicit Peer-Response Procedure Guidelines

Think through the steps students would need to take to conduct the peer-response workshop you’ve designed and create guidelines in writing, audio, or video that explain the procedures. How many students are in each group? What online location is being used if students are sharing digital draft? When are the due dates? Should students complete the worksheet *and* comment in drafts? May they write comments in the draft using “track changes” in Word or the “Suggesting” feature in Google Docs? Can they use Comment Bubbles in Google Docs?

Characteristics of Effective Peer-Response Workshops

- **They are formative, not summative**
Formative peer-response helps students see their writing in a new way, from a reader's perspective, and gives them ideas about how to revise their writing to make it more effective. Summative feedback makes statements about the quality or success of the writing and doesn't give students explicit, actionable suggestions for making their writing more effective.
- **They are focused, descriptive, goal-oriented**
Articulate which features or skills in the writing you want students to focus on when responding to their peers' writing. Creating a worksheet of focused, descriptive features to look for and comment on means that the feedback students receive from their peers will include actionable items (goals they can achieve).
- **They Focus on higher order concerns** (like thesis statements, use of evidence, organization)
- **They occur when students have time to revise**
Peer-response should happen early enough that students have time to revise their writing before the due date (try to give students at least 3-5 days to revise).
- **They requires that students bring substantial work** (so give credit for substantial drafts) and **expects revision** (so give credit for revision)

Use Technology to Facilitate Peer-Response in Physically-Distanced and Online Spaces

- Post peer-response worksheet guidelines and procedures in this same online location such as Moodle or Google Docs. Keep the procedures the same or very similar across multiple assignments.
- Student groups of 3-4 can be listed in Moodle or Google Docs and changed for each assignment; arrange groups based on topic, writing competencies, or randomly.
- Ask students to create a Google Doc folder for all writing done in your class, and to invite you to view/edit all subfolders within this primary folder. Collect all student Google Doc addresses in one place, so you can quickly access them.
- One student can take the lead and create a folder in Google Docs for peer-response, then a sub-folder for each peer in the group. Make sure to remind students to make these folders editable by their peers and by you.
- Students can use Google Docs to exchange drafts and give each other feedback in their documents by turning on the "Suggesting" feature, which is just like "track changes" in Word. Switch to "Suggesting" by clicking the arrow in the upper right corner in Google Docs (you can toggle between "Editing," "Suggesting," and "Viewing").
- Students can also give each other feedback by filling out the worksheet guidelines and saving this document in Google Docs for their peers.
- **Remind students to bring their laptops to class, so they can do peer-response without exchanging paper and while staying six feet apart.**