

Peer Response

Getting productive student input

by Heidi Olson

Giving constructive feedback to help improve someone's work isn't always easy. Comments like, "I really liked it" or "I didn't get it" doesn't help the originator make improvements. As the instructor, you should be modeling constructive feedback when you are reviewing student work so students have an example to follow. But students may need to be given some instructions on how to give helpful comments to their peers. "As a peer reviewer, your job is not to provide answers. You raise questions; the writer makes the choices. You act as a mirror, showing the writer how the draft looks to you and pointing out areas which need attention." - Sharon Williams (Univ. of Hawaii at Manoa's Writing Program) Here are 10 suggestions students might consider when giving comments to their peers.



1 Be thorough. Consider the difference between spelling, grammar, and formatting edits and constructive content comments. While pointing out these errors is helpful, your comments should go deeper. Avoid meaningless suggestions, especially for vocabulary or word choice.

2 Be descriptive. Overly general comments aren't that helpful. If you "like something" or think "it's great," tell why. Understanding why something is likable helps the author better understand how the technique might be used again. If you "don't get it," explain what you think the author is trying say.

3 Look for gaps. Point out possible omissions that might support or oppose an argument that the writer might not have considered. Point out other perspectives and offer examples. Write a short summary of what you read. This might help the author determine if the main points are obvious or not.

4 Read with an open mind. Turn off your own biased opinion. You don't have to agree with the argument. You might have to check your opinion. And who knows, you might learn something along the way!

5 It is ok to cut the fluff. If something seems like filler or that it doesn't belong, suggest omitting it. If the author thinks it is important, then the concept might need to be re-stated or a transition might need to be added.

6 Equal opportunity. Don't praise or criticize without giving an example or a suggestion. Stay positive — if possible, try to keep your criticism and praise equally balanced and detailed.

7 Suggestions vs. corrections. When you receive peer responses, you don't have to accept and make all of the changes. Consider the feedback and determine if you'll incorporate the responder's suggestions.

8 Preparation for career. Being able to give and receive peer responses emulates activities in the real world. Peer responses help make products better, creates efficiency in processes, and provides stronger justifications.

9 For novice reviewers. Have students work in groups and assign each member a specific role: wordsmith, spelling and grammar guru, fact checker, continuity guide, or devil's advocate, for example.

10 Better yourself. Thinking about, and giving peer responses, makes your own work better. You gain an understanding of reviewing your work from a different perspective. You get practice rephrasing and explaining ideas in new ways. You engage in critical thinking skills that exercise your brain!

RESOURCES

UH Manoa's Writing Program:

<http://manoa.hawaii.edu/mwp/home>

Peer Review:

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/guide.cfm>

Teaching and Using Peer Response:

<http://www.gvsu.edu/sws/index.cfm?id=4373F249-D292-BD35-1B6EDB34E892DB87>



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