

Creating Student Peer Review Assignments

By Lauren Rinke

This article will illustrate how peer review will benefit your students both as writers and as learners. Collaborative editing will lead students to recognize their strengths and weaknesses as writers, enhance their critical reading skills, and create a sense of comfort and community within your classes. Peer review will also assist students in creating their best work possible: texts that are equally coherent and engaging. Peer review sessions are essential to compose a variety of texts: from written essays to visual arguments and multimodal presentations.

Just as you would likely consider many opinions if you were writing a research article, your students should also regard the feedback of other student writers when composing an essay. As instructors, we must remember that writing is an extension of the self, and what we write can be very personal and private. However, students must remember that they will compose ideas to be read by a specific audience, and their primary goal is to effectively communicate the ideas to those readers, and peer review sessions will help them do just that.

Scaffolding The Writing Process

Writing is a process, and as instructors, we should break down major assignments into steps, including prewriting and drafting. Students should be asked to prepare a draft of their paper before the final draft is due, so that their peer review partner or group can respond to their writing, address the structure of their essay, and let the student know whether they have fulfilled the requirements for the assignment.

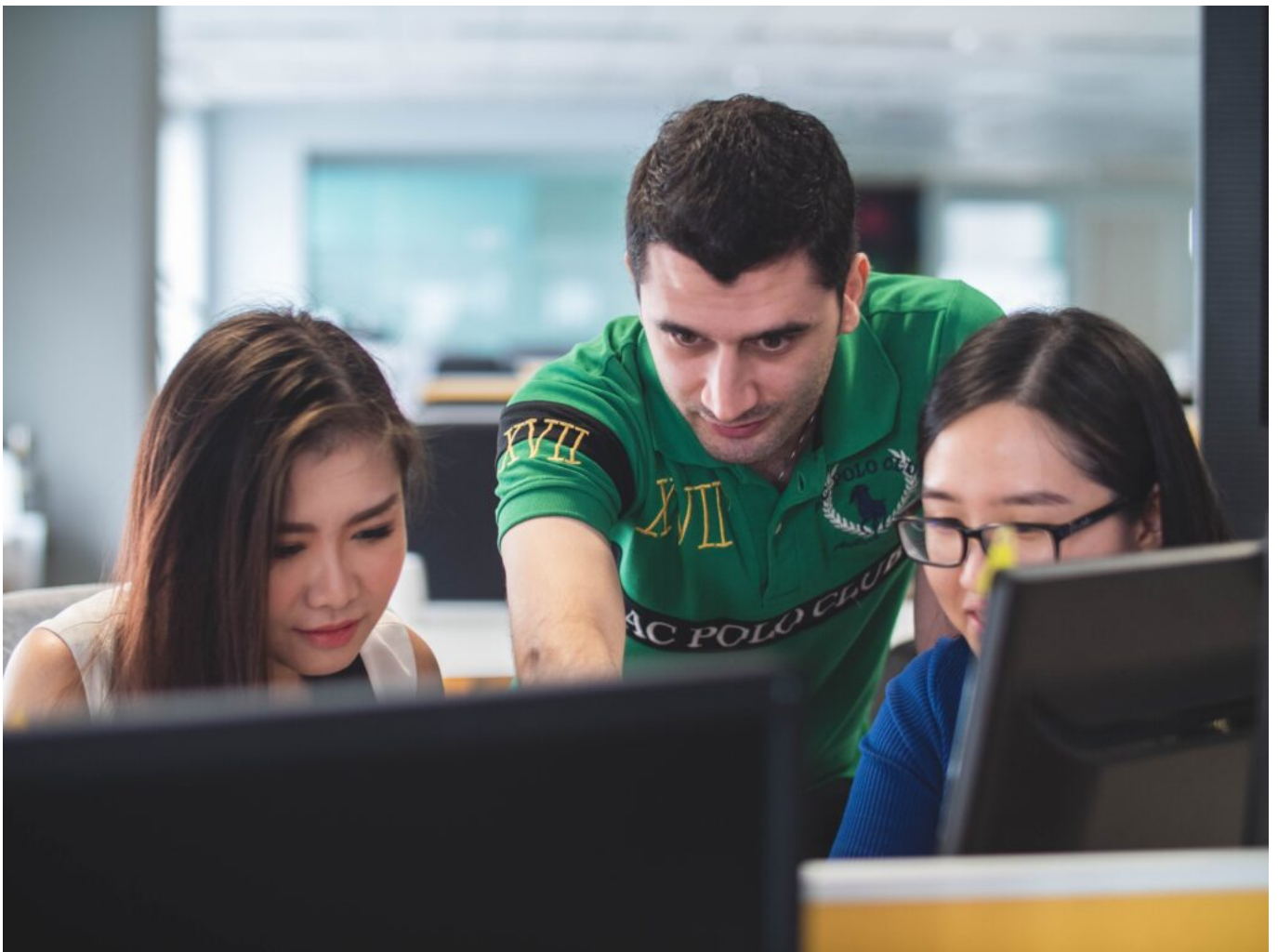
Students should come prepared for peer review with a *complete* draft. The draft is not just a couple of paragraphs; it is essentially a complete version of the essay, but it may still need alterations in big things like organization, argument, and support. Coming to class unprepared on peer review days or uploading only a few pages of a 6-8-page essay will not give students a complete version ready for their review. The more students have completed going into the peer review session, the better the peer feedback will be. Make sure your students are aware of your expectations in this regard.

Peer Review Groups & Setting

There are a variety of peer review settings, which should be chosen by you, as an instructor, to best fit the type of assignment you're working on. If you have a fully or partially online class, you may require students to participate in an online peer review session. CETL and

ODE can assist you in setting up a session on Blackboard. For traditional sessions of peer review, you may ask students to take part in a face-to-face peer review session with one or more classmates.

Peer review groups can be created ad hoc based on topic, seating location, etc. There are benefits to both rotating groups and maintaining groups throughout the semester. Consider assessing your students' writing at the beginning of the semester, and create groups based on their strengths and weaknesses. Working in consistent groups can create a level of comfort in communication.



Communication

Preparation is an essential element for a successful peer review session. Equally important is the ability of students to effectively communicate with their partner or group. You should always ask students to share their writing and have a conversation about it. As previously mentioned, writing can be very personal and sometimes difficult to share. But remind

students that even instructors are asked to share their writing, and peer review is an essential part of all academic work. A journal article cannot be published until several academics have the chance to review the writing and research.

Here are some questions to get your students to start conversing about their writing:

- What are your expectations going into this peer review session? What do you hope to get out of it?
- What are your strengths as a writer? What do you struggle with the most? What do you want your partner(s) to keep an eye out for?
- What was your approach when writing this essay? What were your goals? What were the main points you were trying to communicate?
- Who is your intended audience? Why do you want them to read this piece of writing? Are you trying to inform or persuade your audience?

After completion of peer review, instructors should also offer time in class, or a space online, in which students can discuss feedback with their peer review partners.

Conferencing with classmates will allow students the opportunity to receive the clarification they need to move forward with revisions. Remind students that they should not be afraid to ask peer review partner(s) questions regarding their comments. If something seems unclear, they need be sure to clarify before accepting or dismissing comments. Open lines of communication will allow students to receive the feedback that best fits their writing needs.

Avoiding Universal Praise

One of the hardest parts of a successful peer review session for students is offering feedback that is both respectful and helpful. There are several different kinds of criticism, and certain kinds are more helpful than others. It's tempting for students to want to give positive responses to writing like, "It's good" or "I like it," without offering any specific reasons for these observations. Yes, it's important for students to let their classmate know that they like the essay or that it is successful in meeting the assignment requirements, but generalized statements of universal praise offer no constructive reasoning. Students should add specific examples to their responses so that their peer will know how to move forward.

Local Issues

Sometimes, when reviewing a classmate's writing, it can be easy for students to get caught up on grammar or spelling issues. "Local issues," or "Small Order Concerns," as we call them, are important factors in creating a successful essay, but it's important that students not waste time focusing on such errors early on. Calling attention to small errors in punctuation or grammar should only be done at the very end of the writing process, when the writer is polishing the final draft for submission.

Global Issues

There are several global issues that can interfere with effective communication. One of the biggest culprits is essay structure/organization. Another important global issue students should watch out for is the writer's tone and voice. In addition to encouraging students to review for larger-order concerns and offer text-based responses, students should be also required to answer questions relating to the assignment guidelines.

Concluding Thoughts

Working successfully with peers to review their writing will help students to improve in the areas of effective communication, collaboration, and critical reading. Use peer review sessions to your advantage; any opportunity students have to review and modify their work will create a more polished piece for your final review and grading process.

Questions for Student Reflection

- Identify some of your strengths and weaknesses as a writer. How can you use both the positives and negatives to offer constructive peer response?
- What was your perception of peer review before reading this chapter? How do you feel you can use this information to benefit you in your first-year writing classes?
- Discuss the difference between “global” and “local” issues, and how to provide feedback in both areas. What are some global issues you should be on the lookout for during the peer review for your next paper?
- Look at comments your instructor has made on previous assignments. How can they be modeled or used in peer review sessions? Which comments are the most beneficial to you as a writer? Why were those comments beneficial to you?