

How to Help Students Give Effective Peer Response

Give students specific guidelines for each peer response session:

- Give students questions to answer about their peers' drafts. Consider using a checklist that includes room for written responses, not just a "yes" or "no" response.
- Explain how students should monitor their time in the group and/or in pairs.
- Suggest a set amount of time they should spend on each peer's draft.
- Make students responsible for turning something in at the end of the peer review session, both writer and reviewer.
- Acknowledge and respect the advice students give one another even though you may not fully agree.
- Explain that they are free to use or ignore their peers' advice based on their own best judgment.

Questions students might use in responding to each other's drafts:

- How would you sum up the writer's main claim or focus?
- What two big questions do you have about the writer's argument? How would getting these questions answered help you as the reader?
- What is the most interesting part of the draft for you? (I call it a "hot spot.") Why?
- What part of the draft is clearest and/or most effective?
- What part is least clear and/or effective?
- What specific suggestions do you have for revising the unclear parts?

Ideas for processing peer review commentary:

- Each peer reviewer should write a note recommending revisions to the writer based on responses to the questions above.
- Once reviewers have responded to their peers' drafts, ask the writer to re-read his/her draft with the peers' responses in mind, then to write a note to him/herself outlining the revisions to be undertaken.
- Students might also be asked to pick the draft from their group that they liked the best and explain all of the reasons they liked it. This discussion can help the other writers determine characteristics readers value. The group should then make a list of characteristics they think are important in papers written in response to this assignment.