

USING PEER REVIEW TO IMPROVE STUDENT WRITING

SUPPLEMENT 3: HOW TO WRITE A PEER CRITIQUE

How to Write a Peer Critique

Read each essay twice. You will be surprised by how many things that you didn't understand the first time through will become clear on a second read. Mark up the text as you go along.

Your 1 page *letter* (yes, write, "Dear _____") should look like this:

Paragraph 1: Detail what works in the essay. Avoid using the language "I liked": articulate *how* or *why* something pleases you and thus "works" for the essay. Make use of the vocabulary we use in class. Be as specific as possible.

For instance: *The essay opened immediately inside the argument. Or perhaps: Organization was strong. I could read through the topic sentences one by one and understand the logical progression of the argument. Best was the topic sentence to paragraph 8, which had the tricky role of transitioning us into counter-argument.*

Paragraph 2: Paraphrase the essay's argument as you believe the author intended it to be. This should be your shortest paragraph—do NOT provide a detailed summary or critique.

For instance: *In this essay, you argue that while some critics see The Arabian Nights as a completely misogynistic text, Shahrazad's wit and ability to save herself require us to rethink our perceptions of the role of women.*

Paragraph 3: Consider the quality of the argument. Again, avoid the language of likes and dislikes. Consider whether someone reasonable could argue with the author, whether there is evidence to support the claims, whether the argument is oversimplified, etc.

For instance: *Instead of a larger argument, you've written a list of points which simply delineate the way Woody Allen's films use black and white contrast. Or perhaps: In claiming that Shane is not a hero, you've written a moralistic argument, and values aren't fair game for argument.*

Paragraph 4: Detail other substantial issues you notice in the essay, such as issues related to analysis or organization. **Begin with the most serious problems first.**

For instance: *Your choice of organizing the paper by moving from one source to the next source prevents you from ever clearly comparing sources or fully stating your own opinion.*

Avoid discussing spelling or grammar issues unless they truly inhibited your comprehension of the essay. Be mindful of the fact that “grammar issues” often have more to do with sentence structure than with details like subject-verb agreement or missing or incorrectly used determiners. Thus, it may be helpful to respond to substantial “grammar issues” by simply pointing out that certain sentences are difficult to understand. Suggest that the writer consider breaking down these sentences into smaller units, each of which contains a single idea. If you feel comfortable providing a sample of how the writer may revise such sentences, it’s OK to provide one sample in the margins or on a separate sheet.

Paragraph 5: Make suggestions for the rewrite. Here you are prioritizing the problems you have identified.

For instance: *Find source evidence for every claim you make, especially in paragraph 6, where your argument is the most contentious.* Or: *Add a counter-argument in the penultimate paragraph.* Or: *The ratio of evidence to discussion is highly skewed towards evidence -- expand the discussion of your own ideas.*

Paragraph 6: End with a final concluding thought about the essay as a whole. Sign the letter.