

A Few Scripts for Responding to Writers

It's important to use "we" language whenever possible; the paper belongs to the writer, and you and the writer are collaborating on this project.

As a reader:

I'm lost here.
I don't understand what you're saying here.
Interesting—I'd like to see more.
I don't see any proof here. Can you explain this more?
How does this point relate to what you're saying?
You promised that you'd do X, but I can't find it here.
What's the importance? What do you want your reader to do about it?
I think I see what you're getting at, but I'm not sure.
I didn't believe the message at first, but now I do.

As an interested friend of the writer:

What do you think you're trying to say here?
What bothers you about what you've got going?
Is this really what interests you about X? Bothers you? Etc.
What additional information do you have that you might add?
What is this piece of writing supposed to be? Memo, letter, essay, article, what?
In your own mind, how is this piece of writing organized?
Who are you writing for/to? What are the needs of that audience?
What are you trying to do with this piece of writing? This particular paragraph/sentence?
What led you to say (generalize) X?

As a critic:

This seems unfocused.
You might want to consider breaking up this paragraph—too many ideas.
The essay could use clearer organization.
The introduction could be clearer.
The essay could conclude more forcefully.
Let's find a good transition at this point.
This paragraph would make more sense here.

All forms of feedback can be useful to the writer who is willing to revise. It is important, though, that the writer understands the nature of that feedback and decides what use they can make of it.