

How to Peer Review

NC State Undergraduate Writing Center * NC State Graduate Writing Center
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As writers, it is important to be able to efficiently and productively critique both your own writing and others' with comments that are helpful for revision. Therefore, in order to get the most out of a session and get the best feedback, follow this advice:

Tips for Getting Your Work Peer Reviewed

- **Come with the best possible draft.** You can't get quality and useful feedback if you didn't write anything important to begin with.
- **Tell your reader about your concerns before they read your draft.** It will help if your reader understands areas you are concerned about so they can give you more constructive advice. Perhaps you would like them to look at one section in particular or you could inform them of any changes you are planning to make.
- **Take notes and mark changes on your paper when discussing.** You won't remember everything you and your reader discussed when you revise later! Remember to ask follow-up questions so you understand exactly what your reader means.
- **Stay open to suggestions.** The primary goal of a peer review is to get an outsider's opinion. Remember that opinions can and will differ, but keep in mind that someone is providing their time and energy to help you. Try not to be defensive but instead understand their suggestions.
- **Remember that this is your paper.** Everyone has different writing styles and approaches. Just because your peer wants you to change something doesn't mean you necessarily have to. You are the author and know your paper best. You don't have to take every suggestion.

Tips on How to Effectively Peer Review

- **Criticize appropriately.** Be honest but polite when discussing your comments and don't argue with the author. Make sure to include what works well so the author can repeat it in the future. If you feel uncomfortable with being direct, sandwich your critique between two positive comments or try writing down your critique instead of verbalizing it.
- **Be honest.** While uncomfortable at times, pointing out the concerns you have about the paper is necessary. Vague "good jobs" don't help anyone, so be a good peer and help the writer succeed.
- **Look at and critique the large issues.** Grammar is a rather simple fix, and in early drafts, writers often ignore these types of small concerns. Don't feel the need to point out every small mistake. Instead, focus on big-picture concepts such as the thesis, organization, overall clarity, appropriate evidence, the logical procession of ideas, adherence to the assignment, etc.
- **Ask the writer if you should look out for anything in particular.** If you know what that person is struggling with, you can offer more specific advice and not spend as much time on sections the writer feels more confident with.

- **Refer back to the rubric.** Make sure the work is actually what the assignment requires. The most well written and thoughtful piece will receive a low grade if it is off-topic.
- **Read carefully and efficiently.** Make the review worth the author's effort. Chances are they are reading your work—or would be willing to—in the future, so provide a thoughtful critique.
- **Point out specific problem areas.** Comments can include the following: something doesn't make sense; something is not smooth/seems jumpy; an idea is not clearly explained; there is not enough or too much detail. Don't just write "unclear" or "rewrite" in the margins. **Give the author directions and suggestions.**
- **Be specific.** When noticing a problem, try to identify the specific issues you see for the reader. For example, instead of writing "This paragraph is unclear," find and highlight specific words, phrases, or ideas that the author can change.
- **Remember to be positive.** Constant harsh critiques can easily overwhelm a writer, so remember to mention what you like in the work and what the author does well.

How to Create a Written Critique

Sometimes your professor will require a written critique of a peer's work. Making sure that your critique is interpreted correctly is important. Follow these tips to write productive comments.

- **Read through the paper or section without making too many comments the first time.** Hold back on writing comments until the second read-through because it can help you organize your thoughts. Additionally, reading the entire draft will help you see the big picture to avoid writing unnecessary comments about small things. For example, don't spend your time on a topic sentence if the entire paragraph doesn't make sense and needs to be changed.
- **Comment as a reader.** Don't tell the writer how you would write something differently. Instead, let them know how the draft looks to their audience, who in this case is you. The writer is the writer, and you, as the reader, provide valuable insight as a reader. Let the writer know if their writing is engaging. You can also let the writer know if their writing is difficult to understand.
- **Don't edit the work!** As a peer, it is not your job or responsibility to teach someone grammar rules and edit their work. That is the job of an editor. Instead, give constructive criticism following the above advice.

Works Consulted:

[The Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin - Madison](#)

[The Writing Center at Colorado State University](#)

[The Washington University in St. Louis Teaching Center](#)

The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring (2nd Edition) (Gillespie and Lerner)