

## One Approach to Guiding Peer Response

By Kim Jaxon

For the past few years, I have asked my students to write peer responses to each other's writing, and based on their feedback, we have continued to shape this practice and make it a key component to our revision process. One of the reasons it stays central to our course's work is due to student reflections, as one student commented: *"By far, the most helpful thing we did this semester was peer response. While I feel I got better at writing them, more importantly, they helped me to understand the assignment better by seeing how someone else wrote the same assignment."* My purposes for asking students to engage in this activity vary:

1. I organize the task with an understanding that knowledge is created in dialogue with others; students come to understand their work as they talk and write to each other about texts and ideas.
2. I also see peer response as offering an immediate audience to the paper, as many students comment that they take care knowing that a peer will be reading the work.
3. And finally, as the comment above supports, students tell me that writing the response helps them to reflect on their own approaches to an assignment by seeing how another student handled the same task.

### Rules

**Do not comment on grammar:** While students do circle any typos and other errors they find on the draft essay itself, the written peer response is all about the content and ideas of the draft essay. This way we continue to focus on revision as opposed to editing at this point in the draft.

**Goal to give 2-3 helpful suggestions:** It is easy to be overwhelmed by what to say to a writer's first effort. Give 2-3 substantive ideas for revising. It is sometimes very difficult for a writer to address multiple issues in a next draft, but the responder can focus on a couple of ideas that the writer can do next, keeping in mind that some essays may need more than one revision to reach their potential. Sometimes the best first drafts are really messy as we work to figure out complicated ideas. It is also okay to be direct with each other. Many times, the response starts by telling the writer what is working, but ultimately, the writer needs ideas for revision; it is helpful and necessary to provide this critical feedback.

**The responsibility of the writer:** In order for this activity to be successful, the writer needs to come to class with a draft of a thoughtful, "best first effort" of an essay. And, the writer needs to write a memo that helps the responder to give feedback.

**The responsibility of the responder:** The peer responder needs to take the time to read the draft a few times. Keep in mind the guiding questions created from the Peer to Peer Memo as you write the response.

**Peer to peer memo:**

1. Develop a couple of questions to guide the feedback you need given your goals for the paper.
2. Let the responder know if you would like him or her to focus on specific feedback--are there particular places in the paper that you are more concerned with or are stuck?
3. Explain to your peer the goals/purposes of this paper. What is your paper trying to do? Explain to your peer your ideas for revision you may have already. Are there places that you already know need more work?

**Instructions**

**Writer**

- Read your essay and think about the peer to peer memo
- At the bottom of your essay type your 2 or 3 questions that you would like addressed.
- Duplicate your google doc and title it "Pr first" The second one will be "Peer response 2"
- Share it with your peer. Under permissions make sure they can edit.
- Talk to the responder about your concerns and make sure they understand before they read it.

**Responder**

- Read the paper once through without commenting or editing.
- At the end of the paper, below the peer questions, type your name.
- Then take the paper paragraph by paragraph considering our peer guidelines, peer to peer memo, and the overall tone, theme, and direction of the paper.
- After you are finished go over your general comments with the writer.

**\*Remember to be respectful. Peer review is feedback. These are suggestions to help your paper. You ultimately decide which feedback you find valuable for your essay.**