

# Peer Review Strategies

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Soliciting and receiving feedback on writing is a normal part of the writing process and models the collaborative work that takes place in academic and professional settings. All writers—emerging to advanced—can benefit from sharing their writing with careful, supportive readers. This handout offers practical strategies and a sample checklist to help you participate in the peer review process. However, always tailor your work to your specific audience and assignment.

## Reviewing Another's Work (for reviewers)

Make your peer review feedback more effective and purposeful by applying these strategies:

- **Be a reader.** Remember you are the reader, not the writer, editor, or grader of the work. As you make suggestions, remember your role, and offer a reader's perspective (e.g., "This statistic seemed confusing to me as a reader. How does it connect or support your ideas?").
- **Read the work more than once.** Read the work in its entirety to get an overall sense of the content, structure, and style of a work before conducting a focused reading or review.
- **Know what to look for.** Review the assignment materials (e.g., description, rubric, sample texts), find out what your instructor or TA wants you to look for, and ask the writer about his or her concerns. Knowing what to look for will help you be more focused in both your reading and response.
- **Address the big picture before focusing on sentence-level errors.** To make best use of your time and efforts, look at appropriateness, content, and structure before addressing issues of style or mechanics. This will keep you from spending time making editing suggestions on work that the writer may later delete or rewrite. **The Research and Writing Center's Peer Review Checklist (attached to this handout) can help you address concerns in an effective order.**
- **Structure your feedback.** Writers benefit from **praise** and **questions** as well as **solid suggestions**. Pointing out what a writer is doing well boosts a writer's confidence and gives him or her a model for how to effectively revise other portions of the work. It may also make a writer more receptive to your questions or concerns. Questions allow the writer to reflect on the work from a reader's point of view and while maintaining ownership of the work. Suggestions provide a writer with a concrete idea of what and where to revise. Use all three approaches, offering **praise, questions, and solid suggestions** as you respond to different areas of the work (e.g., content, organization, formatting, etc.).
- **Provide specific and concrete feedback.** Broad or generic comments can be frustrating and confusing to a writer. Instead of saying the work was unclear, identify where you got lost as a reader or where connections might be needed. Instead of saying the introduction was good, let the writer know he or she successfully contextualized and set up the main idea.
- **Provide clear and considered comments.** Remember you are working with a writer and not just a piece of writing, so be considerate and tactful in your response. Also make sure your feedback is organized and clear (e.g., readable, audible, straightforward). Whenever possible, end your response in a positive and encouraging way.

## Receiving Feedback on Your Work (for writers)

Having your work reviewed will help you revise and polish your work and develop as a writer. Consider these strategies when accepting feedback:

- **Help focus the feedback.** If you are struggling with specific part of your work, let your reviewer(s) know what questions you have or what areas you are most worried about, so the feedback and suggestions can be tailored to your concerns.
- **Be receptive.** The purpose of peer review is to improve your writing by allowing you to see your writing from a reader's point of view. Remember that your reviewer is a reader, not the author, editor, or grader of your work. Also, keep in mind that critiquing another's work can be a difficult or uncomfortable process, so be gracious and open to suggestions, rather than becoming defensive.
- **Ask questions and seek clarification.** If you cannot understand feedback, it will not be useful to you. Make the best use of the process by working to understand the response you receive; this may include seeking clarification.
- **Choose what to use.** You may not agree with all the feedback you receive, and that's okay. Consider the feedback you have received from all sources (peers, the instructor, TAs, Research and Writing Center consultants) and decide what suggestions are most useful considering your purpose, assignment, audience, and timeline. Remember that no matter what the feedback you receive, you are still the author of your work and responsible for your revision decisions.
- **Learn from the feedback.** Compare the feedback you receive on this assignment to feedback you have received on previous assignments. Make note of patterns in responses and identify areas to focus on as you revise or write your next piece.

# Peer Review Checklist

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Before beginning the peer review process, review your instructor's or TA's guidelines. Address the following questions as you peer review another writer's work, tailoring your work to the assignment, audience, and instructor's guidelines. Answering these questions in the order they are listed will also help you prioritize your work and make best use of your efforts.

As you provide comments, remember to include specific and concrete praise, questions and suggestions.

## Appropriateness

- Does the writing match the assignment requirements as outlined by the instructor, TA, assignment description, grading rubric, or sample text? Does the work reflect the conventions of the genre or type of writing (e.g., research paper, lab report, lit review, etc.)?
- Is the work appropriate for its intended audience (e.g., tone, content, development, format)?

**Comments on appropriateness:**

## Content

- Is the content focused, well-reasoned, supported, and developed?
- If sources are used, are they introduced, incorporated well, and properly cited? Do they show evidence of thorough research?
- Has the writer adequately addressed the topic, including contextualizing the work and considering alternative viewpoints or approaches?
- Are there holes in the logic or places where more evidence or analysis is needed?

**Comments on content:**

## Organization

- Does the writing progress in a logical and ordered way?
- Does the introduction engage the reader, set the tone for the work, establish context, and lead to the main idea or thesis?
- If there is a thesis statement, does it establish the purpose and scope of the writing through a specific arguable claim and indicate the organization of the work?
- Are body paragraphs clearly focused on a main idea? Do they connect to the main point or thesis and move the writing forward to the conclusion? Is evidence followed by analysis?
- Are headings, topic sentences, and transitions used effectively?

- Does the conclusion explain the implications of the work, remind readers of the main points, and provide a sense of closure?

**Comments on organization:**

## Format

- Is the document set up in the correct format (e.g., margins, font, spacing, headers, page numbers, citations, etc.)?
- If a specific formatting style is being used (e.g., APA, Chicago, MLA) is it being used consistently and correctly?

**Comments on format:**

## Polishing

- Is there evidence the writer has reviewed and revised the work, run spellcheck, and made a clear effort to address previous feedback?
- Are there errors that alter the meaning of the text or make the writing unclear?
- Are there patterns of errors (e.g., repeated punctuation misuse, frequent verb tense errors, multiple sentence fragments, etc.)?
- Is the sentence style clear, engaging, and appropriate?

**Comments on polishing:**

**Additional comments:**