



ELON
UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR
Writing
Excellence

Peer-Response

Main Takeaway

Peer-response is a best practice in writing pedagogy across disciplines because it requires students to think and talk about writing on a meta-cognitive level, thereby helping them become more effective writers. Peer-response encourages productive talk and helps build class community, encourages students to start early and write multiple drafts, facilitates revision, and shows writers how readers respond to their writing.

Visiting the Writing Center is another kind of peer-response, so include a statement about the WC in your syllabus and talk with students about the benefits of working with a peer consultant. Please visit the “Center for Writing Excellence Menu” for more information on hours and services.

Characteristics of Effective Peer-Response Workshops

They are formative, not summative

Formative peer-response helps students see their writing from a reader’s perspective and helps them more effectively revise their writing. Summative feedback makes statements about the quality or success of the writing and does not give students explicit or actionable suggestions.

They are focused, descriptive, and goal-oriented

Articulate which features or skills you want students to focus on when providing peer feedback. Creating a worksheet of focused, descriptive features to look for and comment on means that the feedback students receive from their peers will include actionable items (goals they can achieve).

They focus on higher order concerns

Thesis statements, use of evidence, organization

They occur when students have time to revise

Peer-response should happen early enough that students have time to revise their writing before the due date (try to give students at least 3-5 days to revise).

They require students to bring substantial work and expects revision

Three Common Peer-Response Worksheet Designs

Design #1: Students Create the Worksheet

- Students write questions about their writing to which their peers respond
- Discourage yes/no questions like:
 - o “Is this well-organized? Does my paper flow?”
- Encourage focused, goal-oriented, descriptive questions or suggestions like:
 - o “Rephrase my thesis”
 - o “Identify evidence that is persuasive/not persuasive and explain why it’s persuasive/not persuasive.”

Design #2: Worksheet Contains Evaluation Criteria and/or Rubric

- The evaluation criteria or rubric is the worksheet.
- Peers give feedback according to the evaluation criteria or rubric, given that the evaluation criteria reflect what students are practicing and what is important in any given assignment.
- Designing rubrics is discussed in a later module

Design #3: Professor Creates Worksheet

- Use assignment goals, assignment evaluation criteria, and genre/disciplinary expectations to create questions.
- Avoid yes/no questions.
- Write focused, goal-oriented, descriptive questions like:
 - o “Rewrite the thesis here and explain what is strong/weak about it. How could it be made stronger?”
 - o “Explain how the report does a good job addressing reader needs. Describe two ways the report could do a better job of this?”
 - o “Which use of evidence is the strongest? Explain why this use of evidence is strong. Where is evidence lacking?”

Teach Students to Use the “Describe-Evaluate-Suggest” Model

1. Describe: say what you see as a reader
2. Evaluate: explain how the text meets or doesn’t meet evaluation criteria
3. Suggest: offer concrete advice for improvement (Eli Review)

Write Explicit Peer-Response Procedure Guidelines

Think through the steps students need to take to conduct the peer-response workshop and create guidelines in writing, audio, or video that explain the procedures.

Questions to consider:

- How many students are in each group?
- What online location is being used if students are sharing digital draft?
- When are the due dates?
- Should students complete the worksheet and comment in drafts?
- May they write comments in the draft using “track changes” in Word or the “Suggesting” feature in Google Docs?
- Can they use Comment Bubbles in Google Docs?

Use Technology to Facilitate Peer-Response

- Post peer-response worksheet guidelines and procedures in the same online location. Keep the procedures the same or very similar across multiple assignments.
- Assign student groups of 3-4 and change according to assignment.
- Ask students to create a Google Doc folder for all writing done in your class, and to invite you to view/edit all subfolders within this primary folder. Collect all student Google Doc addresses in one place, so you can quickly access them.
- One student can take the lead and create a folder in Google Docs for peer-response, then a sub-folder for each peer in the group.
- Students can use Google Docs to exchange drafts and give each other feedback in their documents by turning on the “Suggesting” feature, which is just like “track changes” in Word. Switch to “Suggesting” by clicking the arrow in the upper right corner in Google Docs (you can toggle between “Editing,” “Suggesting,” and “Viewing”).
- Students can also give each other feedback by filling out the worksheet guidelines and saving this document in Google Docs for their peers.