

Peer Review Process

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What is peer review?	<p>The peer review process is a chance for writers to show their work-in-progress to potential members of their audience—in this case, your classmates—in order to get early feedback on a text.</p>
Why is it useful?	<p>Even if the readers don't know a lot about the specific content of the writing project, they can share their reactions to the current state of the project, letting the writer know what is working and what isn't. Often, a writer might think that he or she is being clear, when in fact the writing hasn't quite developed the ideas to the fullest. (Even professional writers use an informal peer review process—just look at the acknowledgements page of any of your books!) As reviewers, the peer review process can actually make you more critical readers, which can help with your own writing projects.</p>
How does it work?	<p>Typically, a writer would distribute a draft to peer reviewers, providing an additional outline or commentary to help the reviewers understand the overall vision of the piece. Then, the reviewers would read and reply with constructive comments to help the writer know where to go next.</p>

Step 1: Writers prep their peer reviewers.

- If you have specific concerns or questions about your piece, it would be a good idea to tell your readers ahead of time. For instance, if you're worried about how well you have communicated a particular idea, point that passage out to your readers and ask them to pay attention to clarity.
- If your project is incomplete, you may want to give the writers an outline of where you think the project might go in future drafts. That way, they can read it in anticipation of those final pages, and perhaps suggest alternatives.
- Unless the paper is enormously long, it would be helpful to number the paragraphs on each page (start over at 1 for each new page) as easy reference points for reviewers' comments.

Step 2: Reviewers read

- Usually, a reviewer would read a text silently and take notes (try not to write *on* the paper itself); for shorter pieces, it might also be a good idea for the writer to read the paper out loud—that way he or she can hear how the language sounds while the reviewers listen and take notes.
- While reading or listening, peer reviewers should take detailed notes, recording the specific passages (page and paragraph numbers) you want to talk about.

- Unless the writer specifically requests attention to grammar, mechanics, and other sentence-level concerns, try not to spend time commenting on errors. Remember, this is only a draft. Instead, focus on more “global” issues. Here are some sample questions to keep in mind as you read:
 - What passage do you most like? Why?
 - Was anything confusing to you?
 - Did you disagree with any of the claims?
 - Did you have any questions for the writer as you read a particular passage?
 - Does the paper seem to be arranged in logical order?
 - Is the main purpose or argument of the paper clear?
 - Did the writer use enough evidence? Examples? Outside sources?
 - Was the tone of the writing appropriate to the purpose of the piece?
 - Was the topic interesting to you? Why?
 - Where should the writer focus his or her revisions? Why?

Step 3: The Reviewer shares comments.

- Using reading notes, the reviewer should write either a message to the writer in paragraph form, or a detailed list of comments. The reviewer should try to avoid vague comments (e.g., “This was really good” or “I didn’t get this”); instead, comments should provide full explanations as to why you liked or didn’t understand something, citing specific pages and paragraphs so that the writer will know where to look.
- In addition to the specific comments, the reviewer should also provide an overall recommendation of a revision plan to help the writer focus his or her energies. Be sure that your comments include both positive and negative comments.
- If time allows, the reviewer should meet with the writer to talk about the comments in case the writer needs further clarification.

Step 4: The Writer accepts the comments and develops a plan.

- Now that you have some constructive comments from the reviewer, you should feel free to ask any follow up questions—but resist the urge to argue with the reviewer or to be defensive about your work: even if you disagree, chances are if one reader has a concern, others could have the same concerns later on. Thank the reviewer and start making a revision plan.
- First, take a look at the positive comments: what did they like? How can you make more of the paper like those passages?
- Next, examine the more general comments: was anything unclear? Were there any major problems with the primary claims of the paper? Did the reviewer disagree with anything? If so, make sure you try to address these concerns, either with more research or by saying more to clarify your ideas. For instance, if the reviewer disagrees with a claim, raise that counterargument in your paper and then either refute it, concede to it, or qualify it.
- Finally, if the reviewer has concerns with language (tone, word choices) or arrangement (order of points, structure of the paper), revise with an eye to making your paper’s language and structure match the purpose.