ENG 121 Peer Review Guidelines

No Jeers for Your Peers

Often you will be asked to adopt the role of a peer editor for a classmate's work. Peer editing is a very common exercise, especially in your composition classes. But it is also an exercise that can be easily misunderstood or mishandled. If done irresponsibly, the role of a peer editor can erode into the role of a flattering, excessively polite admirer (“I love your essay. It's the best thing I've ever read. I wouldn't change a thing! A++++++”); an insulting, pejorative critic “Man, an 8-year-old could have written something better than this!”); or a vague, general reader (“The intro was OK. . . . You used examples. . . . I liked the ending. . . . Sometimes sentences were hard to understand. . . .”). Any of these poses leaves the writer without specific, useful information. Your role as a peer editor is to critique a writer's work by offering helpful, objective pointers. Don't hesitate telling a writer about the particularly effective parts of his or her work; positive comments are useful and encouraging. Just make sure to balance the compliments with commentary that will strengthen the writer's work. The process requires respect for the writer. It's not always an easy task to lay open your work for someone else to critique. It is often one of the most helpful ways, however, to gain some perspective on your work.

Keep the following general points in mind when you are editing someone's paper (Govoni, Spoto, and Wright 121):

Choose an appropriate **tone**. Unless you intimately know the writer, avoid joking about the work: your intensions could easily be misinterpreted. Keep to an interested, concerned voice of an impartial observer.

Decide on the level of formality of your word choices based upon your relationship to the writer. For example, an informal tone that uses a specialized slang or jargon won't be of much use to a reader who does not share your specialized language.

Be specific. General or unexplained statements like “great,” “weak,” “I like it,” or “I didn’t understand” will be of no use to a writer unless you follow up with some particulars or examples.

Don't be insulting. No matter how bad you think a work is, insulting the writer only damages his or her confidence. You have a responsibility to honestly critique the work, not to bash it. Balance any negative comment by explaining the problem in detail to the writer and offering suggestions for improvement.

Don’t forget that when you provide feedback, you need to provide **constructive** feedback. Even though many of you may not feel your skill level is sufficient to offer feedback, you can still answer some of the questions, such as does the paragraph have examples?

The specific areas you want to focus on are:

1. Does the paragraph have a topic sentence? The first sentence should combine the topic of the paragraph (in turquoise) with the writer’s opinion (in grey).
   
   *Example:* In order to succeed in the online environment, you need to be organized, self-motivated, and willing to work.

2. Is there a concluding sentence? The last sentence of the paragraph should ease out of the paragraph and connect back to the topic sentence.
   
   *Example:* If you follow these three guidelines, you will succeed in an online environment.

3. Is the paragraph unified, meaning all the sentences support the topic sentence?

4. Is the paragraph coherent? Has the student used any coherence techniques such as transitional words, repetition, order, etc.

5. Has the student used a variety of sentence structures, such as simple, compound, and complex?

6. Has the student maintained one point of view? First person = I; second person = you; third person = they, she/he, them, etc.

7. Does the paragraph have examples? Do these examples add to the meaning of the paragraph?

When you offer advice, such as a misspelling, make sure to tell the student what word is misspelled. If you say you like their topic sentence, tell them why. If you think they need more examples, offer one or two. Support your feedback by helping your classmates make their paragraphs better.

You do not need to answer all of these questions, but you should be using these questions as a guideline when you are offering feedback.

If you have any questions, you are welcome to respond to this feedback.