Peer Review

Peer Review is a sharing of your work with a peer, that is, another student, in order to help you make your expository writing as clear and correct as possible. Peer review helps both the writer and the reader: As you read the writing of others, you learn more about how to write so that your ideas clearly come across to your reader. Using a sentence structure that allows your thinking to flow from the development of one idea to another, and using correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling that enables this flow to occur is all part of learning from reading other students’ work—as well as having your work read by others.

Peer reviewing involves different kinds of activities, activities that accord with each stage of the writing of the paper. In this class, and as a general rule, it is a good idea to put every paper through three drafts, separated in time by at least a day or two, and involving peer review at each transition. Ideally, idea maps and outlines are a great place to begin the peer review process. This process involves sharing of initial ideas and discussion.

**Rough (or first) drafts** are peer reviewed to help the writer clearly develop his or her ideas, to insure that the ideas and thinking of the writer flow, that the ideas are supported by adequate evidence and good, solid reasoning. The revision (literally, the roots mean “seeing again”) process must involve another person, a reviewer, to be effective.

**Second drafts** need a different kind of review: In addition to a continuing review for clarity of expression, the reviewer now checks the paper for correctness of expression. Now is the time to run the paper through a checklist of grammar, punctuation, and spelling rules! Writers need this kind of feedback in order to work on their final drafts.

**The final draft** should also be checked for all of the above, as well proofread (checking for typographical, spelling, and similar errors). *It is vital that you always print out your final draft and do the final check on an actual piece of paper, not on a computer screen!* For some reason, errors that do not appear on a computer screen will sometimes magically show up on a piece of paper. This is why writers generally double-space their work: to give themselves plenty of room to make changes. Again, the use of a reviewer to help with this checking is highly recommended.

**Rough Draft Peer Review Guidelines**

As you review the work of another student, actively take notes on the paper as you read it! Read the paper through once, and then read it a second time. Ask yourself these questions as you read through the paper a second time:

- What is the main idea?
- What are the supportive ideas? Are these ideas clearly expressed? Are they adequately supported by evidence, that is, verifiable facts, reliable authorities, personal experience, and most important of all, clear, logical thinking?
- Is the thesis statement clearly presented in the introduction?
- What about the body paragraphs—is each devoted to developing one main idea that is clearly linked to the thesis?
- Does the conclusion wrap the paper up and contain at least one sentence or idea that reflects back to the thesis statement?

Once you have asked yourself these questions as you read through the paper a second time, share your findings with the writer. Now is the time for the writer to take notes on what the reviewer(s) found.
Second Draft Peer Review Guidelines

Once again, pen or pencil at the ready, read through the student’s paper twice, as you did when you reviewed the first draft. In addition to checking for clarity of expression, just as you did above, add the following items to your checklist:

- Sentence structure—look for fragments (incomplete sentences) and run-together sentences (confusing sentences that contain lots of parts, usually two main clauses, that are not separated by commas or semi-colons).
- Sentence structure—Do short, choppy sentences impede the flow of ideas?
- Subject-verb agreement—Are plural subjects followed by the right verb form? Are single subjects similarly followed by the right verb form?
- Pronouns—Are subject pronouns used in the subject position (before the main verb) and object pronouns used in object position (after the main verb)? Does each pronoun have an antecedent? Does the antecedent agree with the pronoun?
- Spellings—watch out for those tricky homonyms and easily confused words!
- Punctuation—Does every sentence end in a period, question mark, or exclamation point? Are commas used to help the reader understand what the writer is saying?

Go through your findings with the writer!

Final Peer Review Guidelines

Now is the time to check all of the above once more! Let clarity of expression be your main guide! Use the rubrics (sentence, paragraph, essay) provided when you perform the final peer review.

A Word to the Wise

When one writer shares his or her work with another person, that person is committing an act of trust, and hence, the writer and his or her work should be treated with respect. Writing is a very personal thing, as most of us are well aware! When you review the work of another, please keep your comments restricted to the questions above; do not speculate on the value of the ideas themselves—their “rightness,” or “wrongness.” Part of the process of going to college and developing your mind is the development of the ability to be a dispassionate reader, that is, a reader who can step outside of herself or himself and look at an issue or an idea and examine it on its own merits. Look first, understand second, and judge the idea last of all—but keep your judgments to yourself unless asked!

Please feel free to ask for guidance from your kind and understanding instructor if you are uncertain about the peer review process. It is normal to feel uncomfortable about the process, but if your discomfort is extreme, please share your feelings with me. I can help!