



How to give and receive PEER CRITIQUE

Why critique your peers' writing?

The peer-critique process allows you to practice reading critically and writing strategically. You will explore many examples of writing to experience which styles are most effective and/or ineffective for certain writing types. Furthermore, articulating your experience as a reader will strengthen your language around writing, encourage you to consider your audience, and help you develop an editor's mindset that you can tap into in your own work.

Why have your peers critique your writing?

Receiving peer critique lets you see an audience's perspective of your work and gauge the effectiveness of your communication. Viewing your own work from a reader's perspective will allow you to reframe your piece to be more impactful, expound on your main points, and write in a more concise and engaging way. You will also get a second chance to correct vague terms and ideas, improve grammar, and avoid accidental blunders in a low-stakes environment.

Giving and receiving feedback constructively takes practice. We will discuss and practice strategies for giving and receiving feedback to help you become better peer reviewers and better writers.

Giving Peer Critique

1 Paraphrase

Begin your feedback by paraphrasing the writing in a couple sentences. These sentences should succinctly summarize what you as a reader took away from the writing, allowing the writer to gauge the effectiveness of their communication. Do not include any judgements or personal opinions when you paraphrase.

2 De-Personalize the Work

Remember that you are critiquing a piece of writing, not a person. Avoid using the words “you” or “your”, especially when the feedback is negative. This will aid you in remaining unbiased and will help the author of the work receive your feedback more constructively. For example, practice using phrases like “the grammar in this sentence” or “the way this paragraph is structured” instead of “your use of grammar” or “the way you structured this sentence”.

3 Personalize your Experience

Remember that you are offering your personal perspective on the writing as a reader, not passing judgement on what is right or wrong. Offer suggestions rather than demands. The author should be the one who ultimately decides the best way to revise their work. Therefore, practice using “I” statements to describe your perspective. For example, try using phrases like “I wish”, “I wonder”, or “I like” instead of prescribing exactly how the work “should” be changed.

4 Be Constructive

Your feedback should be a well-rounded critique that addresses both what you liked and what you did not like, what worked and what did not work. Avoid solely deconstructing a piece of writing. Instead, whenever you point out something that did not work for you as a reader, provide a concrete example of how the writing could be changed to alleviate the problem. For example, you could say “I liked the way the first paragraph set up a problem and sparked my curiosity. But, I found it hard to follow the narrative through the entire piece. I think it would help if each paragraph began with a topic sentence and ended with a logical transition to the next paragraph.”

Receiving Peer Critique

1 Take Time

Take time between writing your piece, receiving feedback, and responding to feedback. During each of these steps, it is easy to become personally entwined with your piece. When you are too attached to your writing, it may be difficult to empathize with and understand another person's perspective. Taking time between each of these steps will allow you to detach from your piece and move through the peer-critique process less biased and more open to constructive change.

2 Focus on the Constructive Pieces

Remember that the goal of the peer-critique process is to highlight strengths and provide solutions to the weaknesses. Instead of focusing on what went wrong, try to gain confidence from what went right and reflect on your strengths when addressing the weaknesses. This practice will also help you be more constructive and supportive when you critique others' work.

3 Engage in Conversation

Remember that your peers are offering their personal perspective on the writing. You are not required to completely agree with their assessment, but you should reflect on why you hold differing opinions. If you are unable to empathize with or understand their point of view, engage them in conversation to further discuss your perspectives. Receiving feedback from an additional peer can also help you decide how to balance any differing opinions.

4 Reflect on the Process and Product

The peer-review process can help you produce more creative, engaging, and impactful pieces. However, in the moment, it can sometimes feel frustrating and demoralizing. After you have created a final piece, remember to reflect on the process and examine how your work improved from start to finish. Gain confidence from your original strengths as well as how you improved as a writer and a peer reviewer through each step of the process.