

Steps for a Successful Peer Workshop

Preliminary Phase: Establishing expectations for peer workshop

1. Model peer workshopping in the class by bringing in a sample paper and discussing as a class ways of responding to strong areas of the paper and places for improvement (either by distributing copies or projecting the document on a screen).
2. Talk about the difference between helpful and non-helpful comments (stress *specificity*, rather than “this is good” or “I don’t know what you’re talking about”).
3. Discuss the idea that peer workshop is not to fix spelling mistakes or grammar (making it clear that proofreading is the job of the writer, and part of turning in a final draft), and offer the University Writing Center as a place for help on editing/proofreading/grammatical matters (as well as any other writing matters).
4. Be clear about the responsibility of the reader: Peer workshop readers are responsible for commenting on a problem/concern with the paper at hand and for giving suggestions for ways/places to revise, but are not responsible for rewriting the writer’s paper.
5. Be clear about the responsibility of the writer: Charge the writer with being responsible for pushing his or her reader for substantive comments and asking questions.
6. Remind students that the goal of peer workshop is not to make a perfect paper or to fix grammar, but to improve the paper by getting feedback from additional readers, and to give them additional experience as critical readers of others’ work.
7. Provide students with some sample questions to ask themselves as they read. (You can also have this sort of workshop cover sheet as a required part of the response.)

Review Phase: Providing feedback/suggestions for revision

1. Have writers include a cover letter with their drafts, discussing what works, what isn’t working yet, how well their paper is achieving the goals of the assignment, their major concerns for the paper, what revision they’re already planning to do for the next draft, etc. Ask readers to respond to these concerns, as well as any others brought up over the course of reading.
2. Include the response a reader gives on a classmate’s paper as part of the reader’s paper grade. This encourages students to provide thorough, thoughtful comments to their classmate’s work. Criteria for assessing response should be broad (e.g., *response shows evidence of considerable time and effort, response shows consideration of writer’s concerns, response offers a coherent and thoughtful critique of the strengths and weaknesses of a paper*).
3. Give adequate time for review of the draft. If doing an in-class workshop, make sure to devote the majority, if not the entirety, of a class period to it; if a take-home workshop, tell students your expectation of the time they’ll spend on the draft. (45-50 minutes generally seems like a good length of time, depending on the length of the draft.)
4. Have readers write (or type, if a take-home workshop) an endnote to the writer, pulling together their main thoughts on and response to the paper, and responses to questions posed by the writer in the cover letter.

Incorporation Phase: Interpreting feedback to re-envision the work

1. Provide some time for discussion of the workshop comments, making it clear that this is not a time to quibble or to defend a paper, but a time to ask further questions of readers if suggestions could use additional clarification.
2. Have writers type out a brief overview of the comments from each reader following the peer review. This encourages them not only to read the comments, but also to begin to internalize and synthesize the suggestions for revision.