

# Developing Self-Evaluation Skills Through Giving Peer Writing Feedback

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Normally, instructors hope that through peer review (PR) students are able to help each other to make their subsequent drafts better than their first drafts. However, the reality is that students frequently do not seem to trust their peers' feedback. Research suggests that they value their teacher's comments much more than their peers' (Nelson & Murphy, 1993) despite the fact that constraints on time and resources make it difficult for instructors to give every student extensive feedback on multiple drafts. Then, the question that remains is: How can students understand the benefits of PR?

Through personal experience, as well as reading previous studies (e.g. Berg, 1999; Lundstorm & Baker, 2009), I realized that the key is to shift the focus from encouraging students to revise their drafts based on their peers' feedback to taking advantage of the reviewing process itself. In other words, an important objective of PR is to improve students' self-evaluation skills through training them to read a peer's paper critically and making suggestions about how he or she can improve it. Ultimately, the goal is that eventually they will become able to critically review and revise their own papers. With this approach, the ability of students to

give each other equally useful feedback becomes less of an issue, and therefore, pairing students in an appropriate way may become less of a concern as well. Below, I suggest simplified steps for effectively implementing PR based on my experiences in English for Academic Purposes writing classes.

## **(1) Discuss benefits of and concerns about PR:** Students should be

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encouraged to explicitly acknowledge any potential benefits of PR so that they understand the purpose

behind the activity. Before students discuss open-ended questions, however, they should answer simple multiple-choice questions and discuss them in pairs. This preliminary activity might facilitate the discussion. I usually provide several choices based on how I imagine students might feel about PR. By allowing them to choose more than one answer, the discussion can prompt students to confront several issues in a short time. Here is an example:

*What do you like/not like about peer review and why? You can choose more than one answer. Explain your reasons to your partner.*

*(a) Looking for others' grammar mistakes helps me look for mine too.*

- (b) *I can learn from how other people organize their writing.*
- (c) *I have a hard time understanding what the paper wants to say.*
- (d) *I'm not sure if my comments would be helpful.*
- (e) *Others?*

After the discussion, I introduce the idea that there are benefits for giving rather than receiving feedback. I explain that if students have experiences reading peers' writing critically, they should be able to do the same for their own writing (Lundstorm & Baker, 2009).

**(2) Practice giving feedback:** Students should review the same writing sample together and help each other come up with comments. I

recommend providing a worksheet (I call it a *peer feedback sheet*) containing a list of aspects of the writing that you want students to

focus on (e.g. transition features, passive voice, idea development, source-supported evidence, etc.). Students should focus on just a few basic features when doing PR for the first time in order to keep the task manageable.

**(3) Do peer review:** Students (a) exchange drafts with a partner; (b) read the essay and write comments on the peer feedback sheet for homework; (c) exchange comments orally in class. Step (b) is done more effectively at home rather than in class because of time limitations. Furthermore, I suggest this homework be integrated into the grading system to help students take the process more seriously. It is important for students to be provided with time for step (c) in class so that they can explain

their written comments and ask and answer questions about their partner's writing.

**(4) Evaluate own papers:** Students evaluate the same features in their own writing that they evaluated in their peers' drafts. This step can also be done at home. This process should help students apply what they did for their peer's writing to their own writing. To help students acknowledge the benefits of this process, I ask them to highlight all changes that they have made. Another option is to have them highlight changes in different colors depending on whether the change was based on their self-evaluation or on their peer's feedback.

The focus of this activity is not so much about how to incorporate peer's feedback, but rather to have students analyze their

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own paper critically. However, sometimes students may want to use the suggestions made by their peers, but do not know if the change would be appropriate. In such cases, to promote students' sense of ownership toward their writing (Tsui & Ng, 2000), I encourage them to explicitly recognize that they are the ones who make the ultimate decisions about how they can make their writing better. Instructors may want to discuss with students individually about what impact the potential change might have on their writing to help them make decisions.

It would be more effective if steps (2), (3), (4) are repeated throughout the term. Training students to be critical reviewers has long-term benefits such as making them become more autonomous and

independent writers who take their readers into consideration (Tsui & Ng,

2000) and take responsibility for their own writing.

## References

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