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Peer Editing

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The purpose of this article is to help writers understand the inherent benefits of the peer editing process and to become more adept at offering helpful critiques to fellow students.

What is Peer Editing?

Put simply, peer editing is the process of reviewing someone else's work for the purpose of improving it through constructive feedback. In addition to making sure all the essential parts of an assignment are present, peer editors may also scan for argumentative clarity, functional transitions between concepts, proper citations of sources, and sentence-level issues like word choice and grammar. This process benefits both writer and editor, for just as having a fresh set of eyes look over an assignment may illuminate errors the writer has missed, so too can exposure to a different writing style inform and improve the editor's writing going forward. While giving meaningful commentary on someone else's work may feel difficult – or even awkward – peer editing is an important way that students can help each other hone their skills as writers.

Areas for Attention

Though peer editing in a classroom context is not expected to be comprehensive, it is important to understand the key areas one should focus on when offering feedback.

- **Prompt fulfillment:** A peer editor's most basic task is to make sure the writer fulfills the assignment requirements. Do they adequately answer the prompt? Do they include all required components? In a conventional essay, this means checking for a clear thesis, sub-claims supported by body paragraphs, and a satisfactory conclusion.
- **Logical progression:** Scanning for places where the author's reasoning becomes unclear is also a crucial task of the peer reviewer. Are there places where you 'lose the thread' of the argument, or are simply unsure what the writer means? If so, these are essential areas to point out.
- **Source integration:** Most scholarly work will require some form of research. As such, it is important to make sure that the writer is both citing sources properly, and making clear delineation between self-generated thoughts and information drawn from outside sources.
- **Sentence structure, diction, and grammar:** Though you are not responsible for copyediting another student's work, a peer editor should point out any sentence-level issues that detract from the overall quality or readability of the paper. Relevant things to comment on include obvious run-on sentences, excessive repetitions, misuse/misspelling of words, or grammatical errors.

Helpful vs. Harmful

Though a peer editor's job is to apply a critical lens, there is a difference between helpful and harmful commentary. Constructive criticism seeks to come alongside a student by showing them areas for improvement and making helpful suggestions rather than simply tallying their shortcomings. Rather

than simply pointing out errors, seek to offer alternatives and ask open-ended questions that prompt students to expand their thinking, rather than feel shame over perceived failings. Just as rhetoric requires the writer to present just the right tone to appeal to her audience, so too should the editor appeal to the writer with a tone of grace and encouragement.

Examples

- I saw that you used the word ___ here, but I think that ___ or ___ might make more sense in context.
- I'm not sure how the point you're making at the start of paragraph X ties in with your thesis. Could you explain how it supports your main argument?
- The second half of paragraph Y gets a little wordy, I'm having a hard time following your line of reasoning. What is the core message of what you're trying to say?
- I saw that you quoted ___ source in paragraph Z. Remember to include an in-text citation at the end of your sentence.

Tips

1. Ask open-ended questions. This is a constructive way to prompt student thinking, rather than simply pointing out a problem and offering no way to fix it.
2. Remain focused on the big picture. Your job as a peer editor is not to quibble over issues of style and punctuation, but to make sure that the essay functions as a cohesive whole.
3. Be considerate. Remember that your peers have poured time and energy into their work, and that your goal is to help them grow as writers, not to discourage them from trying.

Works Consulted

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