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Subject: Teaching Toolbox: The Benefits and Drawbacks of Peer Review

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Peer Review #4: Running a Peer Review

by Lucy Bryan Malenke

If you have carefully planned your peer review and trained your students to provide high quality feedback, much of the hard work is done. Still, you might benefit from some additional ideas for actually running a peer review.

1. *Provide checklists, rubrics, and/or questions to guide reviewers through the process of providing feedback.* Consider what type of feedback will be most helpful to writers and how you might elicit that feedback from reviewers. In their analysis of ESL peer response groups, [Lockhart and Ng \(1995\)](#) identified four stances that peer reviewers take when providing feedback:
 - authoritative (focused on mistakes and problems),
 - interpretive (focused on ideas that emerge from the text),
 - probing (focused on understanding author intent and clarifying meaning), and
 - collaborative (focused on working with the writer to enrich and deepen the text).

The probing and collaborative stances are more likely to “engage students in a fuller understanding of the writing process” ([Lockhart & Ng, 1995](#)) and to help students make discoveries about their written products and intentions ([van den Berg et al., 2006](#)).

As an instructor, you can influence the stances your students take during peer review by scaffolding. Some scholars have advocated providing peer reviewers with a set of tasks that elicit descriptions, rather than judgements, which can help allay writers’ and reviewers’ anxieties, deter problematic advice from reviewers, and facilitate deep engagement with the text ([Bean, 2011](#); [Nilson, 2010](#)). In [Engaging Ideas \(2011\)](#), Bean provides classroom procedures for peer review and the following examples of judgment vs. descriptive questions (p. 297):

Judgment questions	Descriptive questions
Does the paper have a thesis statement? Is the thesis clear?	In just one or two sentences, state what position you think the writer is taking. Place stars around the sentence that you think presents the thesis.
Is the paper clearly organized?	On the back of this sheet, make an outline of the paper.
Does the writer use evidence effectively to	List the kinds of evidence used to support the

support the argument?	writer's argument. Which pieces of evidence do you think are the strongest? Which are the weakest?
Is the paper clearly written throughout?	Highlight (in color) any passages that you had to read more than once to understand what the writer was saying.
How persuasive is the argument?	After reading the paper, do you agree or disagree with the writer's position? Why or why not?

2. *Monitor the peer review.* Scholars advocate that, during in-class peer review sessions, instructors circulate among groups, answering questions and providing guidance as necessary ([Hansen & Liu, 2005](#); [Topping, 2009](#)). If students are working in groups, it may also be beneficial to appoint a "group manager" to keep the group on task and to raise questions to the instructor ([Hansen & Liu, 2005](#)).

3. *Ensure that peer-review groups have time to provide verbal feedback and to discuss themes that emerged from the feedback process.* Remember that "verbal explanation, analysis and suggestions for revision are necessary elements of the feedback process," which necessitates some face-to-face discussion ([van den Berg et al., 2006, p. 34](#)). In one study, researchers found that written feedback tends to focus on content and style, while verbal feedback is more likely to offer arguments for evaluative comments, to ask questions about the text, and to propose revisions ([van den Berg et al., 2006](#)).

Please click [here](#) to learn more about encouraging revision and assessing the peer review process.

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