

Writing Center @ KUMC

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Peer Review

As a college student, you've probably done peer reviews before. Maybe you felt they were helpful, maybe you thought they were a waste of time. Whatever your previous experience, peer reviews *can* and *do* play an important part in anyone's development as a clear communicator, both orally and in writing. Equally important, peer review enhances collaboration skills in the give-and-take of feedback from classmates and later co-workers. These well-developed collaborative skills will serve you well in the not-too-far future as a member of a care team.

Peer review is not easy. In fact, it can be as hard to give a good review as it is to write a good paper. To ensure that your next peer review of a document is productive, consider several aspects:

1. **Read closely.** As future health care providers, you should read everything closely. You can disagree about what something means, but it's vital to recognize what's in front of you—not what you think it means or would like it to mean. The more you disagree with something, the more you must scrutinize it.
2. **Be honest.** It's as easy to flatter as it is to disparage, but both extremes are far from honesty. If you feel being honest could be detrimental, focus on things that help the writer while protecting their feelings.
3. **Try to be a good writer *and* a good reader and editor at once.** By reading-editing effectively, you can learn to apply the same skills to your own work.
4. **Be as precise as possible.** Figuring out what exactly is going amiss in a paper requires precision. Don't rely on instincts/habits to diagnose. That's not recommended in health care or peer review. Be explicit in understanding what makes a work valuable.
5. **Learn from others.** Recognize and admit that a writer has chosen their own way to write about something, not the way you would have chosen, but a viable way all the same. Look at the *whole* peer critique process from both sides. Suggestions on how to improve should be respectful to the writer and consider what they are trying to accomplish.

Finally, if you feel confused or uncertain about what you're doing, don't worry. Peer review is about helping a friend. When you work together to lighten the load, you're a real friend. That's what being a "peer" is all about! That's what peer review is all about.

Revising a Writing Assignment

Some courses will require one or more peer review sessions to revise a required paper. This is a great opportunity to elevate a satisfactory draft into an excellent draft. Revision is all encompassing. It means not only correcting mistakes in spelling, grammar, or punctuation but also pointing out things that are unclear or inconsistent and offering constructive ways to communicate the main points/ideas of a draft. Be your peer's ally and give more ideas and perceptions to help their cause. You don't need to

play devil's advocate. In the process, both of you will benefit from peer review.

And don't forget to do some actual writing! Don't make peer review all talk. Describe your feedback in written words. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of a draft in writing.

Some things to do during this process:

- Tell the writer in your own words what you hear them saying.
- Describe what happens in your head as you read their words.
- Mention what words/phrases stick in your mind, or what parts you liked best, but don't explain why. Just pinpoint them first.
- Express what you think is *almost* said or implied, just under the surface, and what you would like to hear more about more explicitly or in more depth.
- State what you think is the center of gravity of the paper, not the main point, but rather the source of energy or passion or concern.