

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. Both require a range of things. To ensure that your next peer review of a document is productive, consider several aspects. Here are five essential ones:

- 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. 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. Understand what s/he is trying to accomplish. That will help you to genuinely help them to improve. And it will help you to be a good colleague. That's important in teamwork and interprofessionalism.

Finally, if you feel confused or uncertain about what you're doing, don't worry. None of us are trained how to do PR. But you're learning and you already have communicative power. You just need to harness it. Think of it this way: 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:

- 1.** Tell the writer in your own words what you hear him/her saying.
- 2.** Describe what happens in your head as you read his or her words.
- 3.** Mention what words/phrases stick in your mind, or what parts you liked best, but don't explain why. Just pinpoint them first.
- 4.** Express what you think is *almost* said or implied or hovering around the edges and what you would like to hear more about.
- 5.** 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.