

PEER REVIEW & FEEDBACK FORMS

“I think that an important part of improving your writing is to get other people’s feedback. . . . It helps you—it gives you ideas on how to improve.”—Student

Virtually all of us on the faculty have sent a piece of writing to a journal editor and gotten it back with comments from “peer reviewers.” Typically, we use the comments and suggestions from our peers to guide revision and prepare our work for publication. Many of us find professional peer review vital: it suggests different perspectives and provides valuable feedback on what is compelling and what is problematic in a manuscript. At the same time, peer responses have helped many of us to better understand the “nuts and bolts” of professional writing in our field.

It should be no surprise, then, that students also find peer review valuable, for many of the same reasons. Good peer review, however, does not happen automatically. You can help your students become good peer reviewers by drawing on your own experiences, teaching them what to look for, and creating peer review opportunities in your classrooms. One particularly effective way to guide them is by **developing and using feedback forms**.

DEVELOPING FEEDBACK FORMS

“When you read your classmate’s paper, you think it’s good and you don’t know what else to say. But when the professor gives you questions—the criteria—that really helps.”—Student

Journal editors provide criteria lists to guide reviewers’ comments and evaluations. You can similarly guide your students’ feedback on each other’s drafts by providing them with a **list of characteristics** that are key to their success on the assignment. Such lists have the added benefits of promoting students’ familiarity with characteristics of writing that are important in your field and of **making explicit your evaluation criteria**.

The first step is describing the characteristics in **Sample 1: CRITERIA GRID**

Wea	Satis	Stron	CRITERIA	READER’S COMMENTS
		✓	Assertion: clarity, importance	<i>Your position is clear. I also like the way you explore points that conflict with your main point.</i>
✓			Evidence: relevance, strength, credibility	<i>I don’t see how your second and third pieces of evidence support your assertion.</i>
	✓		Organization: arrangement of ideas, guiding the reader	<i>Pretty good. But the middle paragraph on the second page seemed in the wrong place.</i>
✓			Mechanics: spelling, grammar, punctuation	<i>Many careless mistakes. Better proofreading needed.</i>
	✓		Overall effectiveness	<i>I’m not completely convinced. Your assertion needs to be supported with better evidence.</i>

language your students will find useful and understandable. The next step is easy: convert your list of characteristics into a peer feedback form.

Here’s an example. Your goal is to help students recognize and construct assertion-plus-evidence arguments. You can devise a **criteria grid** (Sample 1) to guide students’ feedback on their classmates’ drafts. If you want fuller responses, you can leave more space for “Reader’s Comments” and ask students to fill the space with specifics.

To prompt even fuller feedback, you can develop a **list of open-ended questions**—like those in Sample 2 (back of this sheet). The amount of space you leave for students to write their responses will indicate how much commentary you expect. You can easily modify both types of forms to fit different assignment guidelines or to emphasize additional aspects of the assignment.

TEACHING STUDENTS HOW TO RESPOND

Even with a feedback form in hand, students will not necessarily know how to respond to peer drafts. Most students need to be taught how to give constructive, useful feedback. One approach:

- 1) Hand out copies of a sample completed assignment (perhaps written by a student in the previous semester).
- 2) Discuss the criteria on the feedback form so that the language becomes meaningful to everyone.
- 3) Show how you would apply the criteria by “thinking out loud” as you read the first paragraph

(Continued on back)

of the paper.

- 4) Ask students to read the paper and complete the feedback form (alternatively, they can complete the form out of class).
- 5) Discuss the responses as a class.

Practice sessions are important for the success of peer review. They give you a chance to clarify the criteria and even aspects of the assignment if that proves necessary.

Student responses such as “This is good” or “This is bad” are too general to be helpful and don’t give a writer enough information on how or what to improve. Show students how to go beyond generalities by **reinforcing appropriate and effective comments** as students offer them in discussion. Encourage them to specify what needs improvement and what works well.

ORGANIZING THE PEER REVIEW SESSION

After students become familiar with how to respond, they can bring copies of their own drafts to class and, in groups of 3 or 4, respond to each other’s writing via the feedback form.

HELPING STUDENTS USE THE FEEDBACK

The final step is getting students to use the feedback they obtained from the forms. Here are several activities that may be helpful:

- Students briefly summarize in writing the feedback they received and jot down the changes they plan to make in their upcoming revision.
- Students submit a cover memo along with their finished writing in which they explain how they revised in response to the reviews they received.
- Students fill out a feedback form on their *own* draft. Then they compare their self-analysis with the peer feedback they received and make plans for the next round of revisions.
- Students use the feedback forms as a checklist before turning in their next drafts.

Sample 2: OPEN-ENDED FORM

(leave space for review comments)

Author _____ Reviewer _____

The goals of peer review are 1) to help improve your classmate’s paper by pointing out strengths and weaknesses that may not be apparent to the author, and 2) to help improve editing skills.

INSTRUCTIONS

Read the paper(s) assigned to you twice, once to get an overview of the paper, and a second time to provide constructive criticism for the author to use when revising his/her paper. Answer the questions below.

ORGANIZATION (10%)

1. Were the basic sections (Introduction, Conclusion, Literature Cited, etc.) adequate? If not, what is missing?
2. Did the writer use subheadings well to clarify the sections of the text? Explain.
3. Was the material ordered in a way that was logical, clear, easy to follow? Explain.

CITATIONS (20%)

4. Did the writer cite sources adequately and appropriately? Note any incorrect formatting.
5. Were all the citations in the text listed in the Literature Cited section? Note any discrepancies.

GRAMMAR AND STYLE (20%)

6. Were there any grammatical or spelling problems?
7. Was the writer’s writing style clear? Were the paragraphs and sentences cohesive?

CONTENT (50%)

8. Did the writer adequately summarize and discuss the topic? Explain.
9. Did the writer comprehensively cover appropriate materials available from the standard sources (e.g., UH, NMFS, FWS libraries)? If no, what’s missing?
10. Did the writer make some contribution of thought to the paper, or merely summarize data or publications? Explain.

GIVE FEEDBACK FORMS A TRY

By developing criteria-explicit feedback forms, teaching students how to respond, and providing opportunities for students to apply the feedback they received, you can

- reduce your own feedback workload
- give students a deeper understanding of how their writing affects different readers
- reinforce their familiarity with revising strategies
- help them to internalize some of the writing expectations of your field.

You can also use the feedback form for your *own* responses to student drafts.