

Reading Others' Work: A Guide for Peer Readers

Peer feedback is non-evaluative

- As a reader, you can offer the writer an outside perspective on whether the content and impact they envision for their work is clearly reflected on the page.
- If you think a part of the writing is “good,” try to articulate why that part is successful or satisfying for you as a reader.
 - Are you particularly compelled by the structure? Are you satisfied with the connection between the argument and the evidence?
- If you think a part of the writing is “bad,” consider instead why that part is not working for you.
 - Are you unsure what the writer’s main point is? Are you surprised or disoriented by a narrative turn or shift in focus?
- If you find yourself disagreeing with an argument, try to identify why you are not convinced. What is missing from the writing that would help you better follow the logic? What in the draft is pulling you away from the writer’s intended meaning?
 - If you find yourself thinking that the writer should cite some other literature, consider what in the writing led you to begin wondering about sources instead of focusing on their argument.
 - “I understood up to here, but when I read ‘x,’ I started thinking about ‘y’ instead.”
 - If you don’t understand the connection between the evidence and the analysis, describe that confusion for the writer rather than offer prescriptions about what you think they “should” have done instead.
 - “I had trouble seeing from this paragraph how ‘x’ led you to ‘y.’”

Writers retain agency

- It’s not your paper! It is not your job to imagine how you would’ve written it.
- Listen to the writer. If they ask for feedback on specific elements, focus on those. If they indicate that they don’t want to discuss certain areas, respect that.
- Consider the writer’s needs. Do they need to talk through an idea? Do they need help thinking about structure? Do they need to clarify their argument?

Describe your experience reading their work:

“As a reader, I...”

- “could visualize what you were talking about because of your word choice here.”
- “found that your introduction clearly laid out what I could expect to read.”
- “was not clear how this paragraph related to the previous one.”
- “was unsure of what the argument or main idea of this piece was going to be.”
- “heard you say ‘x,’ and it sounded like a key part of your argument!”
- “expected ‘x’ to come next and got distracted when that didn’t happen.”
- “had to read this sentence multiple times to understand the meaning.”

Some structures for peer writing consultation:

- Verbal drafting while reader/listener takes notes
 - On paper, jot down the writer’s ideas and answers to clarifying questions. Use notes as a tool to actively listen, and as a point of departure for helping the writer to organize those ideas. Give the writer your notes at the end.
 - This can be a useful activity at any stage in the writing process. If the writer already has a draft, you can help them revise by listening for how well their verbal description of their ideas matches what they’ve written.
- Read and say back
 - Read sections of the draft to yourself and then summarize out loud or in writing what you understood. While you’re reading, the writer can note edits, ideas, and questions in their own copy of the text. If what you say back to the writer is not what they wanted to convey in that section, help them revise so that their intended meaning comes through more clearly.
- Read out loud
 - Read the paper out loud for the writer so they can hear their work in another voice. Do justice to the writing by reading clearly, and pausing when the punctuation indicates. If you stumble or can’t catch your breath, don’t worry! This can signal to the writer a place to stop and consider revision.
 - Make sure to pause (paragraph-by-paragraph, or whenever the writer signals) and discuss with the writer your experience of reading their work and their experience of hearing it read aloud.