



THE WRITING PROCESS

Guidelines for Peer Editing

What does it take to be a helpful, supportive reader? Once you see what such a reader goes through, and serve as a reader and commentator yourself, perhaps you'll better appreciate any reactions you get to your own writing.

Begin your work as a peer editor by approaching your fellow writer's work in a friendly way. Remember, you aren't out to pass judgment on a peer's effort. Your purpose is to give honest, intelligent appreciation that helps the writer become aware of the essay's strong points, not only its weak ones. When you find fault, you can do so by making impartial observations—statements that can benefit the writer. A judgmental way to criticize might be "This paper is confusing. It keeps saying the same thing over and over again." But a more useful comment might be more specific: "Paragraph five makes the same point as paragraphs two and three" (which observation suggests that two of the three paragraphs might be eliminated).

Your job isn't merely to notice misspelled words or misused semi-colons (although it could become a part of the process). Your job is more extensive and should address larger issues: what the writer is driving at, the sequence of ideas, the apparent truth or falsehood of the observations, the quantity and quality of the evidence, and the coherence or unity of the paper as a whole.

CHECKLIST OF QUESTIONS

The following checklist offers a variety of questions to guide you as a peer editor. Not all of these points apply to every piece of writing, but many of them will be helpful in assisting the writer.

Initial Questions

- What is the initial reaction to this paper?
- What is the writer trying to say?
- What are this paper's greatest strengths?
- Does it have any major weaknesses?

Questions on Meaning

- Is everything easily understood? Is there any pertinent information missing from this paper?
- Is what this paper says worth writing about, or does it only dwell on the obvious? Is the writer trying to cover too much territory? Too little?
- Does any point need to be more fully explained or illustrated?
- Is the paper's thesis fully developed?
- Could this paper use a down-to-the-ground revision? Would it benefit from a different topic altogether—one the writer perhaps touches on but doesn't deal with?

Questions on Organization

- Has the writer begun in an interesting way?
- Is the paper's main idea introduced at an appropriate place in order to be effective and informative for the reader?
- Does the paper have one main idea, or does it struggle to handle more than one? Would the main idea stand out better if anything were removed?
- Might the ideas in the paper be more effectively arranged? Can the writer's ideas be easily followed? Does the paper need transitions (words and phrases that connect), and if it does, where?
- Does the writer keep to one point of view—one angle of seeing? If he starts out writing as a college student, does he switch to when he was a young boy with no indication?
- Does the ending seem deliberate, as if the writer meant to conclude at this point? Or does the writer seem merely to have run out of gas? If so, what can the writer do to write a stronger conclusion?

Questions on Language and Writing Strategies

- Does the paper address a particular audience, or does the writer appear to have no idea to whom he/she is speaking?
- Are there any objectionable statements? Should these be kept, whether objectionable or not?
- Does the language convey the writer's meaning? Are any words or phrases too vague?
- Does the draft contain any distracting information or information that seems unnecessary?
- Does it hold the reader's interest? What might the writer do to keep it interesting?
- Does the language of this paper stay up in the clouds of generality, referring always to agricultural commodities and legality, never to pigs' feet and parking tickets? If so, where and how might the writer come down to earth and get specific?
- Are there any specialized words (such as dialect or scientific words) whose meaning needs to be made clearer?

Final Question

Now that I have lived with this paper for a while and looked at it closely, how well does it work for me?

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING COMMENTS AS A PEER EDITOR

To show the writer just where you had a reaction, write comments on the margin of the paper. Then at the end write an overall comment that includes the paper's strong and weak points. Remember, vague blame or vague praise won't help the writer. Don't say, "I like this essay because I can relate to it." It is true that such a response might be satisfying to the writer; however, expressing a comment such as "That example in paragraph nine clarified the whole point of the paper for me" might make the writer satisfied for a good reason.

