

Peer Review: A Few Reminders

General reminders

1. You are a qualified, helpful reader because you are familiar with the context (the class) and the specific assignment. You're not supposed to be an expert in all things writing! Instead, the purpose of peer review is to give the reader a sense of the reactions of an engaged, present reader.
2. Peer review is not a substitute for teacher evaluation. In fact, in peer review, your job isn't to evaluate someone else's work! Instead, peer review offers a way to improve a draft and move it forward before your teacher's evaluation.
3. When reviewing a peer's work, keep in mind that you're working with a writer—not just with a piece of writing. Think about what would be helpful to you as a writer. What kinds of feedback do you find useful and generative in moving your paper forward?

When giving feedback

1. The Toad Sandwich!: Couching areas for improvement in aspects of the paper that are working well is a good way to give feedback. (Love the hair! Not sure about the shirt, but the shoes are great!)
2. Ask lots of questions, as these can help the writer move her paper along the way in revision. (For instance, rather than just saying "expand here!," form a specific question: "What are some other ways that we can see Totoro as representative of the postwar Japanese culture you talk about?")
3. Make sentences that begin with, "As a reader,...."
 - a. For example, if there are ideas that come out of nowhere, you might say: "As a reader, I got a little lost in your first paragraph because first you're talking about Totoro's physique, then you jump to talking about the historical context for the film." Framing it in this way, and making it about your reaction as a reader, is much more helpful than saying, "You jump around too much in your ideas in the first paragraph" or "Your paper needs better organization."
4. Make your written feedback as specific as possible—saying something is "good" or "not good" or "huh?" doesn't help anyone. As above, focus comments on *specifically* how the paper seems to be working (and where, and why), rather than making comments about the writer or the writer's style.

When incorporating feedback

Remember that:

1. It's always *your* paper—take all feedback into consideration, try it all out, and see what works. This doesn't mean you need to do everything suggested in peer review, but you owe it to yourself and your paper to take it into consideration.
2. Writing is personal, but the criticism is about *that particular paper*. (You are all more than the sum of your paper's parts!)
3. Remember that the person was giving you comments in order to help you as a writer and to help your paper, too.
4. Remember as you read comments that they're non-moral—not good or bad, just what worked or didn't work for that reader.
5. Be reasonable about reading comments: Try to be open to feedback but not devastated or defensive. (After all, this is what revision is for!—to help you to improve your paper and make it the best that it can be.)

Happy Peer Reviewing and Revising!