



Guide to Effective Peer Review

Learning to offer and receive generous and constructive criticism are among the most important skills emerging scholars learn in graduate school. Practicing both sides of the process improves your thinking as a scholar. These guidelines will help you give and get as much as possible from your Peer Writing Group.

When reviewing others' work:

- Mark it up and think about **how it is and is not working as a scholarly argument**, what its **strengths** are, and **how it can be improved**
- Pay closest attention to:
 - Structure: how is the argument constructed?
 - Transitions: how do the pieces flow together?
 - Framing: how is the intellectual contribution contextualized and presented?
 - Self-awareness: does the work know what it's doing, understand why it is important, and communicate these to the reader?
 - Match between problem and methodology: does the proposed solution convincingly address the proposed dilemma?

When your work is being reviewed:

- When your fellow reviewers start offering their comments, your first task is to listen.
- Then, think about what they are suggesting and engage their critiques.
- If you don't understand something, ask for clarification. Through the back-and-forth, your ideas will likely become clearer and your writing will likely become tighter.

When the conversation begins at the group meeting:

- **Start with something positive:**
 - "I like..."
 - "What I find really interesting is..."
 - "Wow, you did a great job with..."
- Be sure **criticisms are specific and actionable**. Rather than "I don't like this," try:
 - "The non-specialist reader gets lost here and it would help if you..."
 - "Can you explain to me how this [methodology/tool/technique/etc.] is appropriate to this [research problem/hypothesis/etc.]?"
 - "Please tell me more about how this research contributes to the area..."
 - "This claim seems to overreach—would you consider couching it by.../could you tell me more about why it's important...?"
- **End with something positive.**

The PWG model depends upon all members contributing intellectual energy and writers submitting work on schedule so that readers can prepare for meetings. Manuscripts should be submitted in draft form, as this is when group members' comments can be most helpful to the author(s). By reading peers' drafts, you get the best opportunities to think about how the scholarly writing process works—what you learn from reading your colleagues' works-in-progress will make you a better writer.