

## Peer Review in Context

- 1 Why Use Peer Review?
  - Students learn to see their own writing weaknesses by identifying them in their classmates' texts
  - Creates a writing culture that is active, not passive, for students
  - Reinforces the fact that writing involves revision
  - Creates classroom community, promotes 21<sup>st</sup> century group work skills
  
- 2 Guidelines for Peer Review
  - Break down assignment criteria and peer review goals, a few goals per peer review session, so that students have a focused session
  - Be transparent about the value of peer review (above) and your role: will you facilitate a large-group writing workshop? Will you circle the room and eavesdrop on small group discussions? Will you facilitate class discussion of short excerpts of student work that you compile on a handout or project on a screen? Let them know ahead.
  
- 3 Peer Review Strategies in Context: What's best for your class?
  - **Small Group Writing Workshops**—students electronically share essays or excerpts of essays in small groups (3-4 students) two days prior to class. You give instructions on what the workshop focus is (voice, structure, disciplinarity, intros or conclusions, etc.) They take notes ahead and talk in small groups during classtime. Use nearby empty rooms/spaces as needed. Remind them to keep time to ensure equal time for each text. Circulate some to learn, but mostly stay out of their discussions. If time, ask them to report out at the end. Use in a writing-intensive class or maybe a larger class a minimum of 2-3 times so they can improve as peer reviewers. *P.S. students should print out workshop text ahead or bring an annotated copy on a laptop.*
  - **Big Group Writing Workshops**—1 or 2 student-volunteers electronically share their papers or excerpts several days before class. Everyone prepares comments for class based on what you asked them to look for. You facilitate the whole class discussion one text at a time. Tips: start with the writer reading aloud a paragraph. Then ask the writer to listen and not talk until the end (text should speak for itself). Start with a general question that follows up on the initial workshop prompt and allow silence as students warm up. Let the conversation

get messy; don't rush to "fix" their conclusions too soon. Before closure, do weigh in on what you think are the text's strengths, weaknesses, and possibilities. Let student writer speak at end. Big group workshops are effective for writing-intensive classes. I do just 1-2 per semester, after they have done a few small group workshops. This gives me a chance to assess and push their discussions about writing to the next level. Not everyone likes to facilitate big group workshops—its up to you. There are other approaches to explore—such as Liz Lerman's Critical Response Theory—a very useful approach for workshops.

- **Pairs**—This saves time and is physically easier for a lecture class. Students can send the work ahead OR simply bring a small excerpt (intro, thesis, abstract, conclusion, body paragraph) to class and workshop it cold in pairs for 10-20 minutes total. Just talking about their writing can help move their thinking along.
- **Hand Out of selected excerpts for Interactive Discussion**—works well for small and large classes. You ask students to send you thesis statements, body paragraphs, graphs, bibliographies, whatever, electronically, the day before class. You select and paste a range of their samples (small excerpts) into a document (anonymously or not, ask students to indicate their preference) and make copies for the class. Take 10-20 minutes of class time to look at a few samples and discuss what you see (strengths and weaknesses). This is quick and effective, focused, and "in the moment," "in process," before they hand in their written work. Quality generally improves after doing this a few times.

#### 4 Preparing for peer review

- Take the time to plan the rhythms of peer review and write them into your syllabus. This will save you logistical headaches down the road. Peer review involves some last minute prep but mostly it involves advance planning.
- Try not to assign a lot of other reading, or maybe any other reading, when you're asking students to read one another's work. Other important reading sends the message that you don't expect close reading of student work. Some teachers collect written peer review responses.