

Peer Review Strategies in Context

- 1 Why Use Peer Review?
 - Students learn to see their own writing errors 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 21st century group work skills, creates a 'real life' audience beyond the instructor

- 2 Guidelines for Peer Review
 - Break down writing assignment and peer review goals, a few goals per peer review session, so that students can identify the trees in the forest (goal might pertain to developing a complex argument, understanding a particular genre, etc.)
 - 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 discussion of short excerpts of student work that you compile on a handout or project on a screen? Let them know ahead.

- 3 What's best for your class? Here are a few models to consider:
 - **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 (structure, style, disciplinarity, intros or conclusions, etc.) They take notes ahead and talk in small groups during classtime. Perhaps use a hall or nearby empty rooms as needed. Remind them to keep time and/or you serve as timekeeper to ensure equal time for each text. You circulate but mostly stay out of their discussions. If time, ask them to report out at the end. (Time goes fast). Use this model in a writing-intensive class such as FYSE, CW, or maybe a larger class a minimum of 2-3 times so they can improve as peer reviewers.
 - **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 will speak for itself). Start with a general question that follows up on the initial workshop

prompt and allow silence as students warm up. Let students run down some blind alleys; don't rush to "fix" the discussion too soon. Validate complexity of views. Before closure, do weigh in clearly 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 (FYSE, CW). I personally only do 1-2 of these per semester, after they have done 1-2 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.

- **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, conclusion, body paragraph) to class and workshop it cold in pairs for 10-20 minutes total.
- **Hand Out of selected excerpts for Interactive Discussion**—works well for small and large classes. You ask students to send you specific such aspects of their written work such as abstracts, 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, you can ask students to indicate their individual preference) and make copies for the class. Take 15-20 minutes of class time to look at a few samples and discuss what you see (strengths, weaknesses, and questions). This is quick and effective, focused, and "in the moment," "in process," before they hand in their written work. Quality of writing quickly improves if you do this even a few times.

4 Preparing for peer review

- Take the time to plan the rhythms of peer review and incorporate them into your syllabus. This will save you logistical headaches down the road. Peer review involves some last-minute prep but mostly, for the professor, it involves advance planning.
- Try not to assign a lot of other reading (or maybe any other reading depending on length of texts) when you're asking students to read one another's work ahead of classtime. Assigning other important reading simultaneously sends the message that you don't expect much close reading of student work, that its just an "add on."

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