

Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip Peer Response Workshops for Team Writing

Teaching with Writing



Team-based writing projects are common, particularly in high enrollment courses, and can provide opportunities for students to become familiar with the writing practices of their fields. Scientists and professionals often work in collaborative environments and must negotiate the challenges of limited resources and limited time for major projects. Unfortunately, sometimes the products that emerge from some team writing assignments are disjointed, uneven, and unpolished. In this tip, we'll discuss adapting the typical process of peer response workshops to the context of group writing.

Differentiate between peer editing and peer review/response

Students are familiar with the practice of trading papers, and have often engaged in *peer editing* or *proofreading* as a final step in their drafting process. These reviews often focus on sentence-level errors (grammar, spelling, usage, and punctuation) and are of limited help in guiding substantial revision. *Peer review* often involves students in assessing a colleague's paper, often using an evaluative rubric similar to the one used by the instructor. While some instructors appreciate the attention that such reviews place on grading criteria, others can be concerned that students lack the experience or knowledge to evaluate effectively, or that they might be hesitant to criticize a peer's work.

Peer response, by contrast, asks students descriptive questions about the drafts they are reading. Rather than asking a reader to guide revision based on presumed expertise, peer response activities require that students to describe the features of a piece of writing they notice without necessarily demanding that they diagnose or remedy any faults they perceive. For more guidelines on [creating effective peer response workshops](#), consult our earlier tip.

Provide specific criteria for responses

In all of these contexts, teams will perform better if they are asked to provide detailed and specific feedback regarding observable characteristics of the document. Questions that require explanation or evidence are more effective and helpful in the context of peer response than yes/no responses. The table below offers some recommendations.

Closed-ended review questions

Does the paper have a thesis?

Does the paper include three sources?

Is the document well organized?

Is the paper formatted correctly?

Open ended response questions

What is the central argument of the paper?

How do the three sources cited contribute to the paper?

How is the document organized? What united the sections?

Where would you recommend format changes?



Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip Peer Response for Writing in Teams

While closed-ended questions might be effective for a final checklist for writers, the open-ended response questions demand that the readers engage more directly with the document. The details provided by the responder require the student writers to make choices about their writing, rather than simply make corrections or making choices based on up/down votes.

Structure review/response teams to incorporate multiple perspectives

When students are writing independently, it is easy to simply pair and share. When writing in teams, it can be valuable to draw respondents from multiple teams to provide a greater variety of perspectives. In a course with five or fewer teams, consider drawing one or two members from each group to consider each document. In a course with six or more teams, you may choose to keep the number of respondents more limited.

In each case, take a small amount of time for the panel to review your response questions before they begin reading and some time at the end for the reviewers to compare notes and discuss next steps. In some classes, you may choose to create groups and have the initial discussion at the end of one class period, allow for review between meetings, and reassemble briefly at the start of the next session for comparisons.

Provide adequate time for students to reconcile feedback and develop a revision plan

In addition to providing adequate time for detailed response, teams will benefit from having the opportunity to compare their feedback and make choices about what changes they wish to make. You may choose to require students that submit a summary of their feedback and revision plan as a means of assessing their work in class. If effective teamwork is one of the learning goals for the assignment, this sort of concrete deliverable can be a good opportunity for teams to collaborate and make decisions.

By asking students to read and respond outside of class, and address peer feedback when all students are present, teams will have opportunities to seek clarifications, ask questions and make decisions about revising. For more advice on [assigning revision memos](#), consult our earlier tip.

Learn more:

- MIT Comparative Media Studies/Writing [Incorporating Peer Response](#)
- Eliason and Schrand, [Exploring Response Cultures in the World of WAC](#)
- Kory Lawson Ching, [Peer Response in the Composition Classroom](#)

Further support: Visit us online at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww>.

To schedule a phone, email, or face-to-face teaching consultation, [click here](#). Our purpose is to provide practical strategies for teaching with writing.

Our goal is to offer timely and pragmatic support to faculty members and instructors who teach with writing in undergraduate and graduate courses in all disciplinary areas.