How to Give and Receive Effective Feedback

Introduction

Careful peer review of a classmate’s work is beneficial to both you and your classmate. Your classmate benefits by getting specific feedback that will help make their piece of writing more effective. Feedback in the form of constructive criticism is very useful when revising a paper. You can benefit too from peer review by seeing what another student does well and needs to improve on, which can highlight strengths and weakness in your own writing. Plus, the act of offering analysis and targeted feedback can make you better at reviewing and revising in general. Additionally, it gives you experience in critical reading.

Giving Feedback

Preparing to Give Feedback

When your classmate gives you a paper to review, ask them for the main idea they are trying to communicate and note this, in a few words, somewhere on the paper. Return to this as you read the paper to check your classmate’s focus and clarity.

Read the paper carefully, taking time to note your first reaction to different sections. This will help you examine your own approach to reading and will help the writer see how their work is received at the outset.

Remember, you are offering feedback as a reader, not a writer – don’t worry about how experienced you are as a writer or how qualified you feel to offer feedback on someone else’s work. At this stage in the writing process, a reader’s input will be the most valuable.

If you are still unsure of what to look for when editing a paper, take a look at our Peer-Review Checklist (Table 1). This will help you identify some specific things to watch for while you are editing.

**The Process of** Giving Feedback

1. Know what the writer intends to say in their document and focus on whether they actually say it.
2. Focus on higher-order concerns – the most important and significant things to fix – don't give TOO much feedback; instead, just focus on the main points/learning targets: clarity, effectiveness, and correctness.

Table 1: Peer-Review Checklist for Assessing Higher-Order Concerns

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Checklist | Questions to Ask as You Review | ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ |
| i. Clarity | * Do the words and sentences convey what they *intend* to? * Is anything confusing? |  |
| ii. Effectiveness | * Does the writing engage the *given* audience? * Does it have an *appropriate* tone for the *given* audience? * Does the writing express the ideas clearly for the *given* audience and *purpose* of the assignment? * Does the writing *emphasize* the main points and use *appropriate* words and sentences as support? |  |
| iii. Correctness | * Is all the grammar correct? * Do any errors reduce the clarity or effectiveness of the paper? * Was the paper checked for spelling, verb agreement, tenses/form, and basic punctuation? |  |

1. Be supportive and honest – say what you like about the writing and try to explain everything in a positive way. Make sure you focus on the effectiveness of the paper as it appears to you as you read it.

* E.g. Instead of saying: “This is not interesting,” or, “This thesis statement is poorly worded,” say something like: “This paragraph is a bit confusing to me because…” or, “I like the way you included this, but I’m not sure if this part of the sentence is necessary.”

1. Give positive feedback, but also highlight main areas of weakness. Make sure to keep your tone approachable and positive in your comments, even when you are critiquing.
   * *Why do this?* Offering work for peer review can be intimidating and stressful for both parties involved. Focusing on keeping the tone positive makes it easier to offer feedback and makes it easier for the recipient to engage. Think about times you have received commentary on work: it is easier to learn and avoid becoming defensive if the commentary is constructive and also acknowledges strengths, as opposed to when it is simply a list of your shortcomings.
2. Make comments in writing and use additional paper if you need to.
3. Make comments in the file if you are reading it as a digital copy as well. However, make sure you word your comments *carefully* to avoid any misunderstanding.
4. Be specific in your feedback - say *why* something is confusing or *why* you might disagree.
5. Always give examples, whether you are the reader or the writer, asking the reader to focus on specific elements of the project.
   * *Why do this?* Providing examples adds clarity in communication and demonstrates the observations you make. If you are the reader, using the writer’s own work to illustrate your observations can help the writer to understand how you are relating to the work in a specific and memorable way; if you are the writer, using your own work to illustrate your requests to your reader will help them see your work from your perspective.

Receiving Feedback

Preparing to Receive Feedback

1. Before you give a paper to your classmate, choose a few things that you would like to receive specific feedback on. Either make a note of these on your draft or let your classmate know when you exchange drafts. This is a good idea if you have been given a list of required points to comment on or questions to answer within the assignment instructions.
   * *Why do this?* Two reasons: first, it forces you to read your own work very carefully, so as to notice what is going well and what you feel isn’t quite right. Second, it ensures that the reader will check the logic, flow, and transitions of your paper.
2. Take the time to proofread your draft before sharing it with your reader.

* *Why do this?* Often, readers see proofreading as the first, best, and easiest way to help a writer. Doing a quick proofread to correct obvious errors before sharing your project with your reader takes away the distraction of errors in grammar, punctuation, format, and mechanics and allows your reader to focus on what really matters (the content and logical development of your work).

The Process of Receiving Feedback

1. Have a positive attitude and try not to become defensive.

Revise your work to address appropriate feedback – carefully decide which feedback to use – you have the final say and can decline advice if you disagree. However, unless there is a good reason, it might be risky to ignore advice from someone who will be grading your work. It can be frustrating if you spend a lot of time as a reader providing detailed, constructive comments that would improve a piece of writing, only to have the writer ignore these in subsequent drafts.

1. Keep a record of the types of comments you receive to guide the way you write future assignments.

Reflecting after Feedback

Make sure you understand the written and verbal feedback that you have been given.

If you need more information or clarification about the assignment or feedback you have received, don't be afraid to ask for it!

* + *Why do this?* Your professor/instructor has office hours for a reason and is happy to help. Don’t be intimidated! Check out the ‘How to Approach Instructors’ part of our site if you need some help!