From Peers to Professors: Learning How to Be an Effective Editor

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How to Be an Effective Writer

Peer Review as a Solution

The challenge is how to best hone students’ editing skills. Peer editing represents a great solution for a number of reasons:

✓ Peer assessment of writing can be as effective, if not more so, than teacher assessment (Topping, 1998)

✓ Helps students develop critical skills for professional development and gives them invaluable insight into life as an academic

✓ Critically examining other people’s work can help students turn a more refined eye to their own work

How to Implement Peer Review in Graduate Courses

Assign Peer Reviewers

- Students pick a final paper topic at the start of the semester.
- The instructor assigns a peer reviewer based on writing ability and a lack of overlap in the topic to ensure that students can write for a diverse audience.

Rough Drafts Due

- Students turn in two copies of their rough draft – one to the instructor and one to the peer reviewer – this occurs approximately six weeks into the semester.
- These drafts are only worth a few points and are graded rather generously.

Edited Drafts Due

- One week later, the peer reviewer and the instructor return the edited drafts to the author.
- The peer editor also submits a copy of the edited draft to the instructor – this copy is graded based on how constructive, thorough, and articulate the feedback is.

Peer Review Meeting

- One week after the edited drafts have been returned, students meet during class time to discuss how to best address the reviewers’ concerns, particularly if there are discrepancies.
- Students are strongly encouraged to read over their reviews carefully prior to this meeting.

Final Paper and Cover Letter Due

- At the end of the course, students submit their final paper, the edited rough drafts, and a cover letter detailing the revisions they made in response to each of the reviewer’s points.
- The final papers and cover letters are each graded according to their respective criteria.

Does This Approach to Peer Review Work?

Across the various semesters that this process has been implemented, the results have been overwhelmingly positive – both for the students and for the instructor.

✓ Student writing on the final paper is significantly better, resulting in better grades. Students also report that the process was especially helpful later in their professional careers.

✓ The demands on the instructor for editing students’ work are significantly reduced.

Peer review appears to be an effective way to put editing back into the students’ hands.