

PEER EDITING

It's not unusual for a writer to feel that his or her work is perfectly clear, even though another reader may find the writing disorganized, confused, or lacking in specificity. Reader-feedback is usually a great help in revising a first (or even second or third) draft. Read your classmate's paper carefully. Write as many comments as you feel are necessary on the paper, keeping in mind that the point is to offer constructive, interested, intelligent criticism, in order to allow the author of the paper to improve his or her work. Here are some suggestions as to how to go about this process, which should take at least 20 minutes per paper:

1. Read the paper through once; try to get a general feeling of what it is about.
2. Read it again, more slowly, marking points which seem either especially strong or especially confused.
3. Without referring back to the paper, try to express in your own words the ideas you remember most clearly. What is the paper's thesis? Do you have trouble identifying it? Is there more than one?
4. Consider each paragraph: is it fully developed, with a clear central idea, and a good reason for being a separate paragraph? How does it relate to the paragraph which precedes it, or the one which follows? Would it make more sense in a different place? Does it seem to go on for ever and wander from point to point, or is it clear and concise? Does it relate to the thesis of the paper?
5. Does the paper use the text well to support its argument? Or does the author appear to ignore parts of the text which might contradict his or her argument? Has he or she missed passages which might have provided especially strong support? Do quotations fit with the grammar and syntax of surrounding questions?
6. Consider spelling and grammar: are there spelling errors? If so, are they significant (i.e. has the author misspelled the names of authors or characters)? How do such errors affect your reaction to the paper as a whole? Is the prose clear? Are there errors in the construction of sentences? Do grammar or syntax errors interfere with intelligibility? Make suggestions as to how these problems may be improved, but only if you are sure you are right!
7. Finally, what are your overall reactions? Has the author convinced you of his or her point of view? Has he or she at least made you reconsider your own point of view? How effective is the paper as a whole?

Write the author a brief (one or two paragraphs) summary of the strengths and weaknesses of his/her paper. Return this with your copy of the paper.

NOTE TO WRITERS: Remember that this is intended as a constructive exercise , not an attack. You do not have to answer every question your readers pose, or solve every problem they point out. Read over the feed-back you have received, trying to keep an open mind. Consider the kinds of changes, additions, deletions you might make if you re-wrote the paper.