

Peer review guidelines and expectations

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Writing often seems like a solitary activity: just you at your keyboard, typing away. However, ideas don't exist in a vacuum; your ideas are built upon the thoughts, notions, successes, and failures of others. Entering the university system, you are joining a community of scholars. And, as ideas are built off the concepts of others, so too can your ideas be fortified by input from other scholars. Using peer-review exercises is one way for people to provide you with feedback that can help clarify and solidify the strength of your essay. You will also find that as you peer-review the essays of others, your own writing becomes stronger.

Your job as a peer-reviewer is to provide your colleague with feedback that will be useful in revising of their essay. You will read your colleague's paper very carefully and respond to the ideas put forth in the paper. If you notice grammatical or spelling issues, you may feel free to underline them on the paper, but the focus of the peer-review is the content and style of your peer's essay—leave the grammar for the instructor.

This is not “handing out criticism;” it is very useful to have others look at your work. Another set of eyes can help you find areas of your essay that can use clarification or more support. Telling a colleague, “yeah, it was good” and not giving them more detailed advice isn't actually being nice...it gives them no help as they face the revision stage. Be respectful—people have a very personal bond with their writing—yet do your best to point out the areas that are successful and unsuccessful. This lets the writer know what DOES work...and how it looks in comparison to the less successful areas.

You will write a letter to your colleague that includes most or all of the following:

- ❖ Is the intro interesting?
- ❖ Restate your peer's thesis, word for word. (If you can't find it, please note that as well.)
- ❖ Do you believe the thesis is strong enough (Think Debatable?, Insightful?, Focused?)
- ❖ How well is the thesis carried throughout the essay: does the essay stray away from or contradict the thesis?
- ❖ Identify at least one claim OTHER than the main point that you found compelling (using your own words) and explain why this information appealed to you.
- ❖ Do the paragraphs flow well and have transition sentences?
- ❖ Point out any places where you had trouble understanding the argument or became confused by the essay's point (don't try to fix these places; simply let the writer know where the writing isn't clear).
- ❖ Does the conclusion match the focus of the paper?
- ❖ Does the conclusion synthesize the argument and the main aspects of the essay
- ❖ Any suggestions for new avenues of research? (Ex. 'take another look at page 43...I think you could find a quote there that would work perfectly in your 3rd paragraph).



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