

Planning Effective Peer Review Activities

Planning an effective peer review experience is more complicated than you might think. While the tendency to pair students up, tell them to read each other's papers, and leave it at that is common, there are several ways you can help your students have a more meaningful peer review experience.

Kenneth Bruffee notes that collaborative learning benefits students' collaborative abilities in their future careers and helps students learn to support each other throughout the writing process. Since much of the work students do in writing classrooms is collaborative, it makes sense that they should help each other through the revision process as well.

Research on peer review practices has shown that students tend to focus on surface errors when they review each other's work. Also, the success of a peer review experience depends a great deal on how the teacher prepares students for the peer review process and models giving good feedback. Below are recommendations to help you plan meaningful peer review activities.

1. **Provide a guide for peer review.** This can be done by providing a worksheet, writing prompts on the board, or using a PowerPoint slide. Help students know what to focus on by providing categories or specific questions to guide the reader. However, make sure not to overwhelm them with too many questions. Aim for four or five questions/categories.
2. **Require or encourage complete drafts.** Many students won't benefit as much if they only bring a partial draft for peer review day.
3. **Have students read their essays aloud to each other.** Making them slow down and read their work aloud helps them find their own minor errors as they read, allowing their peers to focus on bigger issues like evidence or organization.
4. **If possible, put students in groups of three.** More than three papers can be overwhelming to get through in a class period, and having more than one person review a paper is more beneficial, so the magic number is three.
5. **Have students provide feedback verbally and in writing.** While they may fill out a worksheet and hand it back to the writer, they should also verbalize their feedback; this helps the writer absorb the information in more than one way.
6. **Make sure you participate.** If you sit back and relax on peer review days, students will likely view it as unimportant. Circulate around the room, check drafts, jump into groups and offer feedback (but not too much), and make sure the students know this is an important activity.
7. **Have students reflect on what they learned.** While you may not do this on the same day, having students reflect on what they learned through peer review can help them better understand its importance. Sometimes they learn something new just by reading their work aloud or reading someone else's work. For instance, you might ask them to write a paragraph describing their revision plan based on their peer review or what they learned about their writing from going through the activity or even have a few students share what they learned or their revision plans.