



## Guidelines For Writing Groups

*Writing groups can be an effective tool for supporting student literacy. When done well, writing groups train students to be helpful readers and independent editors. The following guidelines will help you successfully establish writing groups in your classroom.*

### Establishing Writing Groups

#### *Set goals for writing groups*

- Determine group goals based on the objectives for each assignment.
- Strategize questions and activities that will direct students to look at specific elements of each others' writing.

#### *Determine the size and character of the writing group*

- Determine whether you want one-on-one feedback, small groups, or medium groups.
- Decide whether you want to assign groups randomly or strategically. Strategic groups may be assigned by topic, or by balancing writers' strengths or group-work skills.

#### *Create guidelines for the groups*

- To help keep groups on track, create a PowerPoint or handout that will guide the group through the activities and questions you designed.
- For students new to peer feedback, you may also want to consider using templates for directive feedback, such as those found in the box below.

### **1-to-1 or Small Groups?**

One-on-one groups will allow students to provide more **in-depth** feedback.

Small groups of 3-5 students will provide a range of opinions. Small groups will emphasize **making critical decisions** about helpful feedback.

### **Sample Directive Feedback Templates**

“A really engaging part was ... because ...”

“A confusing part was ...because ...”

“A suggestion I can offer for improvement is ...”

“One thing you should make sure to continue doing is ...”



## NCTE 6.1

### Using Writing Groups

#### *Outside the Classroom*

- Independent students may be able to effectively workshop peer writing outside of class.
- Even when conducting writing groups in the classroom, it can be helpful to have students read their peer's work before coming to class.

#### *In the Classroom*

- In addition to the writing group guidelines, students should follow a three-step response process:

- 1) **Offer compliments!** Students should tell their peer what is working well in the paper.
- 2) **Describe what they've read.** Students should describe how the paper is working in relation to some guiding questions. These questions can be the same for every workshop, but can also change depending on the writing assignment.
- 3) **Offer suggestions** about what could be improved. Many teachers will find it helpful to ask students to define the two or three areas that could be improved.

#### **Sample Guiding Questions:**

- 1) What does the author's argument seem to be?
- 2) What strategies does this author use for integrating quotes?
- 3) Which parts of the essay were confusing to you? Why?

- Students with limited peer review experience often believe that peer review and writing workshops are primarily for correcting errors in grammar and mechanics. It is important to explain to students that the purpose of peer review is to help them focus on higher order issues like argument, organization, and evidence. You can always organize a separate activity where students can help one another edit.
- It is also often necessary to explain that the purpose of peer review is not simply to assist the student whose paper is being workshopped. Discussing writing decisions, identifying what works and does not about a piece of writing, and strategizing solutions to common writing problems helps every student in the group improve his or her writing.

#### *Monitoring Writing Groups*

- As students work, the teacher's job is to help students provide balanced feedback. At each stage in providing feedback, templates for responding can be helpful in guiding students who are learning to:

**Be positive:** Some students will not know when their criticisms are too harsh.

**Critique:** Some students may be hesitant to critique, and will only tell their writing group what they think has been done well. Remind students that even when a paper is good, it can always be improved. Any constructive feedback they can offer will benefit the writer.



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**Be Specific:** Students may default to offering general feedback, such as “It was good,” or “Some paragraphs don’t flow.” Encourage students to point to particular sections of the paper that exemplify their comments.

### *Evaluating Student Participation*

- Many teachers find it helpful to have students submit an editing worksheet or response memo in which they provide written feedback to peer writers (see the Read/Write/Think links below for specific examples). This can be a great way for you to evaluate participation and help students learn to offer constructive, specific feedback.
- A written workshop response in which students reflect on what they have learned can be a great low-stakes writing assignment that offers the opportunity for metacognitive reflection.

### **Read/Write/Think Peer Review Examples**

#### *Peer Review Guide: Narrative*

This mini-lesson includes a lesson plan and handout for teaching students how to use the peer review strategy *Praise—Question—Polish (PQP)* to improve narrative writing.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/peer-review-narrative-122.html?tab=1#tabs>

#### *Peer Review Guide: Professional Resume*

This lesson offers a guide for using peer review when teaching high school students to write professional resumes.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/help-wanted-writing-professional-1110.html?tab=3#tabs>

#### *Peer Review Guide: Annotation*

As part of teaching students how to write effective annotations, this lesson includes a peer review guide.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/teaching-student-annotation-constructing-1132.html?tab=3#tabs>

#### *Peer Review Strategy Guide*

While this strategy guide was developed for earlier grades, it offers concrete ways to teach peer review and help students give constructive feedback.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/peer-review-30145.html>



## **NCTE 6.1**

### **Other NCTE Resources (requires NCTE Log-in)**

*Peer Editing with Technology:*

<http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/EJ/0946-july05/EJ0946Extra.pdf>

*Approaching Authentic Peer Review:*

<http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/EJ/0985-may09/EJ0985Approaching.pdf>