

**Peer Review in Context**  
August Writing Retreat, 2013

- 1 Why Use Peer Review?
  - Students learn to see their own writing errors by identifying them in their classmates' texts
  - Creates a writing culture that is active, not passive, for students
  - Reinforces the fact that writing involves revision
  - Creates classroom community, promotes 21<sup>st</sup> century group work skills
  
- 2 Guidelines for Peer Review
  - Break down writing assignment and peer review goals, a few goals per peer review session, so that students can identify the trees in the forest (goal might be: complex thesis statement)
  - Be transparent about the value of peer review (above) and your role: will you facilitate a large group writing workshop? Will you circle the room and eavesdrop on small group discussions? Will you facilitate discussion of short excerpts of student work collected on a hand out or projected on a screen? Let them know ahead.
  
- 3 Peer Review Strategies in Context: What's best for your class?
  - **Small Group Writing Workshops**—students electronically share essays or excerpts of essays in small groups (3-4 students) two days prior to class. You give instructions on what the workshop focus is (voice, structure, disciplinarity, intros or conclusions, etc.) They take notes ahead and talk in small groups during classtime. Use the hall or nearby empty rooms as needed. Remind them to keep time and/or you serve as timekeeper to ensure equal time for each text. You circulate but mostly stay out of their discussions. If time, ask them to report out at the end. (Time goes fast). Use in FYSE, CW, or maybe a larger class a minimum of 2-3 times so they can improve as peer reviewers. Maximum, use small groups 2-3 times per paper. P.S. *students should print out workshop text or bring it on a laptop.*
  - **Big Group Writing Workshops**—1 or 2 student volunteers electronically share their papers or excerpts several days before class. Everyone prepares comments for class based on what you asked them to look for (structure, word choice, thesis, etc.) You facilitate the

whole class in discussion of 1 text at a time. Tips: start with the writer reading aloud a paragraph. Then ask the writer to listen and not talk until the end (text should speak for itself). Start with a general question that follows up on the initial workshop prompt and *allow silence* as students warm up. Let students run down some blind alleys; don't rush to "fix" the discussion too soon. Validate complexity of views. Before closure, *do weigh in clearly* on what you think are the text's strengths and weaknesses. Leave them with a sense of direction. Let student writer speak at end. Big group workshops are effective for writing-intensive classes (FYSE, CW). I do 1-3 per semester, after they have done some small group workshop. This gives me a chance to assess and push their discussions about writing to the next level. Not everyone likes to facilitate big group workshops—its up to you.

- **Pairs**—This saves time and is physically easier for a lecture class. Students can send the work ahead OR simply bring a small excerpt (intro, thesis, conclusion, body paragraph) to class and workshop it cold in pairs for 10-20 minutes total. Make students accountable by asking for hands of who brought their workshop excerpt to class.
- **Hand Out of excerpts for Interactive Discussion**—works well for small and large classes. You ask students to send you thesis statements, body paragraphs, graphs, bibliographies, whatever, electronically the day before class. You select and paste a range of their samples (small excerpts) into a document (anonymously or not, ask students to indicate their individual preference) and make copies for the class. Take 10-20 minutes of class time to look at a few samples and discuss what you see (strengths and weaknesses). This is quick and effective, focused, and "in the moment," "in process," before they hand in their written work. Quality generally improves.

#### 4 Preparing for peer review

- Take the time to plan the rhythms of peer review and write them into your syllabus. This will save you lots of headaches later down the road. Peer review involves some last minute prep but mostly it involves advance planning.
- Try not to assign a lot of other reading, or maybe any other reading, when you're asking students to read one another's work. Other important reading sends the message that you don't expect close reading of student work.