

4. USING PEER RESPONSE

To make peer response work for your class, consider the following:

1. Plan the logistics.

- Will students swap papers with one other student or with several?
- Will this be done in class or as a homework assignment?
- Will they choose their peer readers or will you?
- Will they read texts aloud?
- Do they need to bring extra copies of their work?
- What happens to students who don't bring their completed assignments?

2. Give them practice.

- Bring a sample piece of writing and respond to it together.
- Point out features appropriate to writing in your discipline: is first person acceptable? What kind of supporting evidence is required? How are visual elements incorporated?

3. Give them direction.

- When students are evaluating each other's papers, see that they have only a few specific criteria to consider.
- Possible questions:
 - Does the introduction set up the paper?
 - What is the thesis and is it supported?
 - Are charts or illustrations used effectively?
 - Did the author apply a theory correctly?
 - Did the author adequately defend a point of view discussed in class?
 - Where do you need more information?
 - What part of the paper is the strongest?

4. Set a positive tone.

- What's the most convincing evidence?

- Where did you feel the most engaged by this piece?
- Which ideas are worth further exploration?
- What's one thing you wouldn't change?

5. Keep it short.

- Consider having students exchange only part of an assignment, particularly for a longer project.

6. Look to the future.

- Since students are reading drafts, encourage them to suggest revisions: What three things can the author do to improve this paper? Which section warrants further research? Which ideas need more connection?
- If students are reading partial papers, have them suggest evidence the author might use to defend a position or consider what should be mentioned in the conclusion.

7. Limit the “fixing.”

- Proofreading is probably premature since these are just drafts.
- Students could point out only those surface errors that appear repeatedly or that interfere with the author's meaning.

8. Simplify.

- Peter Elbow says that if you try nothing else, just have students exchange papers and read them—no commenting required. He believes that alone will help students start to think of themselves as writers, with readers waiting to hear what they say.

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