8.10: Giving and Receiving Feedback

In many writing classes, you will be expected to give feedback to your peers. This task is usually called peer review, a concept you learned about in Chapter 3. At first, it may seem intimidating – you may think, “I’m not an instructor! How can I give useful feedback to another student?” Don’t worry – it’s a learning process. Just give your peers an honest reaction as a reader and provide advice based on your own experience.

Figure 8.4: Providing feedback
Giving peer feedback

Think about the kind of feedback you would like to get and how you would like it to be given. Here are some basic rules for responding to someone else’s writing.

- First, listen to the writer: what kind of feedback are they asking for? Do they want to know if their main idea/thesis is clear? Do they have questions about citing sources? Make a note about what kind of feedback they have requested and keep it in mind as you respond.
- Be kind. It’s easier to take criticism if the person giving it is kind and respectful.
- Comment on important issues first: Did anything confuse you? Did the paper meet the expectations of the assignment? Did the organization of the paper make sense?
- Use I statements to help focus on your own reactions: instead of saying, “You aren’t clear in this paragraph,” try saying, “I’m confused in this paragraph. Did you mean X or Y?”
- Be specific. Never say “I liked it” or “It was good” unless you follow up with an explanation of exactly what you liked or thought was good. The same goes for criticism; say exactly what confused you or what was missing.
- Ask questions to clarify what the writer means, what the resources given are saying, and what the writer is trying to do.
- Offer advice based on your own experience. For example, “if this were my paper, the two things I would do next are A and B.”
- Don’t try to make the writer sound like you. Tell them if a word is incorrect, but otherwise word preference is just a matter of style and voice.
- Correcting errors is important at some point, but it makes no sense to spend time editing a paragraph if it may be deleted or changed. It’s okay to remind the writer to run spell check and grammar check if you notice minor errors, but otherwise, only ask about errors if they make the meaning unclear.

Receiving peer feedback

Next, consider your role in receiving feedback. Are you eager to get feedback? Afraid to share your work? Either way, remember that you get to decide what feedback to accept. If you don’t think the feedback is correct, ask your instructor what they think. You can’t ask your instructor to read sections of your paper, but you can ask specific questions. Make sure you leave ample time to do so.

It’s a good idea to ask for the kind of feedback you want. Don’t be afraid to give your peer reviewer some direction. When you receive feedback, listen with an open mind. The peer reviewer is your reader, and it’s helpful to know what an actual reader got out of your writing.

If you aren’t sure about the feedback or feel upset about it, take a break. It’s okay to say, “I’ll think about that.” If you feel that the reviewer is trying to change your style so that the paper doesn’t sound like you anymore, consider whether the feedback actually helps you make the paper better. If not, feel free to set the feedback aside.

Student Tip

Consider Your Instructor’s Feedback
Closely review feedback from your instructor. You will keep making the same mistakes unless you think critically about them and make an effort to change. Document the feedback in a journal and refer back to it as you write other papers.

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