Synchronous and Asynchronous Peer Review
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Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch notes that the field of writing studies is used to imagining peer review through the processes and metaphors of oral, face-to-face communication. Breuch suggests that *virtual peer review* requires a process of "remediation" that is attentive to the differences of time, space, and social context experienced by students in remote learning classes.
Scholarship on peer review in OWI (online writing instruction) emphasizes two points: 1) the use of multiple modes and strategies for different parts of the writing process, and 2) the necessity of providing models and training for the peer review process that will give students a clear understanding of the instructor's expectations.

1. **Use multiple platforms and modes of peer review (synchronous, face-to-face, asynchronous) to support different moments of drafting and revision**.

The mode and medium in which peer review is performed affect the types of comments students give, and the quality of revision they carry out.

Asynchronous **peer review**, in which students exchange writing outside of class and compose written commentary through the Word or Google Docs comment functions, gives students more time to write thoughtful comments, and alleviates some of the social discomfort associated with giving critical feedback to peers in-person. It tends to produce more comments, and more revision-oriented comments, although students tend to focus on local, sentence-level issues.
Synchronous **peer review** gives students the opportunity to engage in a real-time dialogue about their writing, ask more clarifying questions, and negotiate the scope of their discussion, which tends to produce more global (structural) comments.

This leads Ching-Fen Chang to the conclusion that "arranging various modes appropriately at different stages of drafting and customizing peer review training in using these modes may maximize the effects of peer review in the writing process." There are various ways to organize this mixture of peer review modalities, but some suggestions are:
- Organizing synchronous peer review sessions via Zoom or other platforms to produce commentary on a first draft, and using asynchronous review processes such as Google docs comments to review subsequent revisions.
- Organize asynchronous peer review sessions during which students write comments on peers' writing, and include opportunities for students to meet synchronously to discuss their comments.
- Organize stages of asynchronous peer review throughout an entire drafting and revision cycle such that students receive written comments on their brainstorming, outline, thesis + argument, introduction, etc. Then arrange synchronous meetings to discuss a full draft.
- Give students a peer review instruction sheet that guides them toward providing certain kinds of review comments aligned with specific moments in the drafting and revision process. First draft peer reviews might draw attention to structural and epistemic issues, while later peer review sessions might solicit feedback on more local issues of syntax and style.

2. **Model the review process for students, and provide clear instructions for peer review specific to the different modalities.**

Whether synchronous or asynchronous, students provide more meaningful and specific feedback on their peers' writing if they are given clear guidance on the processes and conventions of peer review. Training in peer review procedures is especially important for online writing instruction because there is less opportunity for real-time course correction in online environments.

Hui-Tzu Min notes that peer review guidelines sheets can sometimes lead students to pay more attention to answering the questions on the sheet than in providing substantive feedback on the writing, so she recommends **providing training in the specific review process you are employing** *before* **students are asked to do it.** Peer review training can encompass a combination of:

- Modelling the review process in class or in a video lesson
- Facilitating a discussion about the purpose and strategies of peer review with students, and developing a set of review guidelines together
- Troubleshooting the peer review process on a practice text as a class before students perform peer review on their own writing
- Conducting preparatory individual and small group conferences with students before peer review sessions to discuss and practice the process

The training you provide for peer review should be attentive to the kinds of feedback you wish to solicit from students, and explicit about what that feedback should look like.

- Breuch suggests clarifying the different roles within the peer review encounter (author and review/reader), appropriate dialogic strategies, and suggestions for constructive criticism. Table 1 on p. 152 offers sample questions on topics such as audience, organization, and design to help frame constructive dialogue between students.
- Min's study recommends a 4-part procedure for guiding online peer review that moves through the stages: "Clarifying writers' intentions → identifying problems → explaining the nature of problems → and making specific suggestions." (See Appendix A)
- Finally, Guasch et al. note that student writing performance improves most when receiving epistemic feedback (i.e., "requests for explanations and/or clarifications in a critical way") or epistemic+suggestive feedback (i.e., epistemic feedback as well as suggestions for revision). Consider incorporating training and guidelines on types of feedback into your peer review lessons.

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