

## Peer Editing

Many ENG and HUMN classes include a writing workshop or peer editing component. This is a chance to have your work read by your peers and to read their work in turn. The value of providing feedback on the writing of your peers is not just for the writer—as a reader, you will learn a lot about what works or doesn't work in writing by seeing what works and doesn't work in the writing of others.

### GIVING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

- Read the writing thoroughly before making a single mark on the paper.
- Look at the big picture of the work instead of the details of sentence errors or spelling mistakes. Is the argument (if there is one) clear and well supported? Does the writer give appropriate examples to explain her ideas? Are all of the points in the piece well connected to one another? Is the organization of the piece logical and compelling? Does it build satisfactorily to a conclusion? It will be more valuable for your peer to know what you, as a reader, experience while reading the work than to see a lot of edits on the page.
- Think about ways to phrase your feedback respectfully. Don't write anything, for example, that you would not be comfortable reading about your own work. This doesn't mean you have to be overwhelmingly positive, but try to find at least one or two good things to say about a piece before writing any negative feedback. Many teachers try to begin and end with positive comments as a way to "sandwich" the negative ones: this can be a good way to communicate concerns without attacking someone's self-esteem.
- Give constructive feedback. Feedback that says nothing but "great work" is as ineffective as feedback that says "this is garbage" (which, of course, you would never write: see above). Think about what you would want to hear if this were your writing. You don't have to give glowing reviews to everything, but a negative critique should be backed with suggestions for improvement or specific detail about why it doesn't work. Similarly, you can comment on pieces that you think are extremely strong and explain why you think they work so well.
- It's not enough to say "I like this" or "I don't like this." Give detailed reasons. Say why or how.
- Try to work with the form or subject of the piece even if you don't like or agree it. While it's fair enough not to like a certain form or argument, recognize and respect that a writer/artist has chosen that and find ways to help further the work. (This doesn't mean you can't suggest alternative forms or arguments, only that you should try to work within the scope of the work as it is presented).
- Try to imagine that you're communicating with the person whose work you're critiquing face-to-face. Don't write anything that you wouldn't be comfortable telling them in person.

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF CRITIQUES

- When reading critiques or feedback about your own work, keep in mind that others are trying to help you improve your writing or your work. What they say is not a criticism of you, your abilities, or your creativity. Sometimes, particularly if you feel close to a piece of personal writing, it may be hard to take criticism, but try to take all criticism as a way to improve the potential of your art or writing.
- The critiques are NOT a dialogue between the writer/artist and the critics. While it's tempting to want to justify your work, especially in the face of potential criticism, it is better to use the critiques to improve your work. Read the critiques of your own work thoroughly, more than once, before you ask for any clarification from whoever gave you feedback.
- USE the feedback from your peers to improve your writing in the revision process.