

Effective (online) peer feedback

A large number of scientific studies point out that peer feedback has a positive effect on students' writing skills. When students provide feedback to each other, they get more engaged, they compare their own work to that of others and they reflect on how they can improve their own work. In order to apply peer feedback effectively, it is important to follow a set of guidelines. We offer some tips & tricks for this, which follow from scientific research.

These tips & tricks are also valuable when you use an online tool to organize the feedback process. The tips & tricks help you making the right choices in the tool. In the UU, common tools are [Peergrade](#), [Feedback Fruits Peer Review](#) and [Pitch2Peer](#). These tools are supported by Educate IT. Pitch2Peer is suitable for video feedback, e.g. on presentations, Peergrade is designated for written assignments, Feedback Fruits Peer Review can be used for both. Blackboard also has possibilities but does not allow you to organize the process as smoothly as the special tools do. Thus, this requires very explicit communication about expectations and deadlines.

Tips & tricks for organizing peer feedback effectively

- **Ask students to use the assessment criteria or the learning objectives for the course or the assignment.**
In the online tools you can include a rubric or other assessment model. Don't forget to also use the criteria in the assignment and in the peer feedback instruction.
- **Organize mutual feedback, in small groups of three or four students.**
In online tools the standard procedure is often that students are assigned to a group anonymously and at random, but this is not the best way. When students know who the others in their group are, they will feel more responsible and they will be able to have a discussion (either online or face to face) about the feedback. Groups of three or four are preferred over couples. In this way, students are less dependent on one other student that might delay the process when he/she is late.
- **Make sure that students all finish their (written) assignments before they start providing peer feedback.**
Set a deadline for turning in the assignment. In online tools there often is an option in which you can keep track.
- **Peer feedback should not be voluntary, but a clear and obligatory part of the course.**
 - Make the peer feedback assignment an obligatory part in the course. Here you have various options:
 1. Finishing the peer feedback assignment is required to pass the course;
 2. The teacher assesses the quality of the provided peer feedback and includes this in the final assessment of the course (e.g. for 10%). You can take a sample here, or focus on the final suggestions for improvement;
 3. The student writes a paragraph in which he/she reflects on the received feedback and how he/she incorporated this in the revision (or: what feedback he/she considers most useful and why). The teacher includes this in the final assessment of the course.
 - Be clear in what students must do and when (set deadlines).
 - Provide clear instructions, for instance in a feedback form with open spaces. Start of by mentioning the purpose of peer feedback: to reflect together on the content and quality of the work. Then ask a number of questions that students have to answer about the other's work, based on the assessment criteria or learning objectives. Ask students to provide specific, substantiated feedback, which can either focus on the strong points or on points for improvement.
 - Revision of the (written) assignment, or reflection, is a crucial part. In a revision, the student incorporates feedback he/she received, preferably with a paragraph of reflection for the teacher. An alternative for a revision is to ask students of a peer feedback group to reflect together on the peer feedback: what did they do well and what can they improve? The process (the way the student handled the assignment) can also be a topic of reflection.

- **Train students to provide feedback on the right level and build this up slowly.**

As students progress in their educational path, their peer feedback skills will improve. Students go through a number of stages:

1. Familiarization (giving compliments, 'proof of reading');
2. Clarification (asking to clarify or add further information);
3. Enrichment (asking for deepening/elaboration).

If you do not provide a clear instruction for peer feedback, students will not get past phase 1 or 2. You can train students by letting them practise first. For instance, take an assignment of a student of last year and ask students to provide peer feedback (by using as set of criteria or questions). Then, discuss this with the students and point out what they did well and what can be improved.

Contact

For more information or didactic advice, you can contact dr. Claudy Oomen (c.c.e.oomen@uu.nl) or dr. Lindy Wijsman (l.a.wijsman@uu.nl) of Education Consultancy & Professional Development (O&T). For questions about the use of the online tools, you can consult [Educate IT](#) (in the UU).

References/further reading

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