Facilitating Effective Peer Review Workshops
University Writing Program – David Yockel, Jr.

Peer Review Workshops embody some of what is most integral to academic work; but it can be challenging to foster student investment and active, critical engagement in the process. While I am always looking for ways to frame and facilitate more effective peer review processes in my classes, below I have outlined a process with which I continue to have success.

The Peer Review Workshop is one class period, but in the class meeting immediately prior we spend the day discussing two texts on the subject: Richard Straub’s article Responding—Really Responding—to Other Students’ Writing and a short video made by MIT “No One Writes Alone: Peer Review in the Classroom”.

They discuss Straub in small groups, and then after we watch the video I have them write reflectively for a few minutes in response to this prompt:

In class we watched “No One Writes Alone: Peer Review in the Classroom” and talked about Richard Straub’s article Responding—Really Responding—to Other Students’ Writing. Now take some time and think about the process of peer review: What are your insights into responding? What has worked for you? What do you wish people would do or not do when they respond to your writing? What would make you most inclined to listen to responses and use them to change your work?

After they have had time to reflect, we go around the room and share out with the goal in mind to create a list of “valued practices.” I then transcribe and disseminate these “Peer Review Valued Practices” via myCourses and the list becomes an artifact that the students have at hand as they engage in the peer review workshop the next class meeting.

Here is an example of a list that one of my sections generated last semester:

- Remember that your main charge is to provide the experience of a reader; bring a new perspective to the text.
- Be focused and specific in both your praise and criticism (look at the individual word choices and phrasings of the text and try to think through all of their implications).
- Try to be open-minded and willing to hear other perspectives.
- Remember that we are engaged in an exercise of exploration.
- “Wonder out loud with the writer about their ideas.”
- Tell the writer very concretely where the text can be improved (expanded, complicated, or enriched).
- Look to inspire/motivate the writer to explore new possibilities.
- Come in with your OWN (as the writer) questions and “interests” for the process.