

Unit #1 Peer Review Exercise

For most of us, writing is a difficult process that often yields disappointing results. We may have great ideas, but we struggle to get them out of our heads and onto the page. Or, we may generate a first draft with ease, only to find ourselves stuck when it comes to organization and revision. Whatever the case, I suspect we all have one thing in common: our writing could benefit from a second (or third, or fourth) perspective. Even the best writers rely on friends and editors to review their work before they declare it “finished.”

Today, you will review three of your classmates’ projects; in return, you will receive three new perspectives on your work. I’m sure that all of us have been through some terrible peer review exercises, and I know that some of you disdain peer review. For one day, I’m asking you to forget your past experiences with peer reviewing and approach this exercise with an open mind.

Preparing Your Documents for Review

Open your documents in Microsoft Word and save them to the desktop with the following titles: “Full Name Glossary – Review 1.doc” and “Full Name Info Sheet – Review 1.doc”. Then, repeat that process two additional times, changing the “1” at the end of the file names to a “2” and then a “3.” When you’re done, you should have six files on your desktop, waiting to be reviewed. (Note: If your glossary and information sheet are contained in the same Word file, you may only have three files on your desktop.)

Reviewing Your Classmates’ Documents

We will rotate around the room three times, so you will end up sitting at three different computers to complete your reviews. When we rotate for the first time, open your classmate’s documents with the “1” at the end; you are now reviewer #1 for these documents. (At the following computers, open the files with “2” and “3” at the end.) Spend approximately twenty minutes reviewing the glossary and information sheet. Follow these steps to complete the peer review exercise:

1. In Word, go to View > Toolbars > Reviewing and make sure “Reviewing” has a check mark next to it. You will see the Reviewing toolbar near the top of the screen. Click the “Track Changes” button. From this point on, anything you type or change in the document will be “tracked” so the original author can “accept” or “reject” your suggestions. Because you are the only reviewer of this version of the document, feel free to delete words or sentences, add new text, and rearrange words, sentences, or paragraphs. **In other words, think of these documents as if they were your own and you were being asked to turn them in at the end of class.**
2. Scan your classmate’s entire documents quickly *before* making any comments. It is important to be specific when you comment or ask questions about perceived strengths or weaknesses about someone else’s document; the writer needs to have that information in order to know what to work on and what to carry over to future drafts. To make comments on a particular sentence or paragraph, highlight the text you want to comment on, then click the “New Comment” button and type your comment in the bubble that appears in the margin.

3. After you have read through the documents, go back to the beginning and answer the following questions, making corrections and comments as you go:
- Does the glossary contain at least 20 terms, with definitions that are a full sentence or longer?
 - Whether or not you are familiar with the subject matter, imagine that you are the intended audience—a new member of the field in question. Are the definitions easy to understand? Do they use clear, simple language? Do they avoid complex or unfamiliar acronyms and jargon?
 - Are the terms in the glossary organized according to some pattern? (alphabetical, by subtopic, etc.)
 - Do the glossary definitions use multiple strategies to explain and clarify the terms? In other words, is there some variety in the glossary, or do all of the definitions follow exactly the same pattern?
 - Does the information sheet focus on a single product, process, or concept? If not, suggest ways in which the author could narrow his/her focus. In other words, help the author determine what should stay and what should go.
 - Does the information sheet *describe* rather than *instruct*? If the information sheet reads like a set of instructions, suggests ways the author could revise the document so that it emphasizes description, not instructions.
 - Does the information sheet use at least one original or adapted illustration? Suggest places in the document that could be improved by adding (or modifying) graphics.
 - Does the author use a consistent visual style (including fonts, margins, borders, headings, emphasis strategies, etc.) throughout both documents? How could the document design be improved?
 - Do the documents “give credit where credit is due”? If not, suggest a strategy for citing sources, either in the documents themselves, or in the analysis memo. Mark any inconsistencies in the citation format used throughout the documents.
 - If time permits, read through the documents and mark/highlight any sentence that “sounds funny.” You don’t have to take the time to revise these sentences (or even know exactly what is wrong with them); just call them to the writer’s attention.

Revising Your Unit #1 Documents

At the end of the exercise, save all of your review files to your flash drive or network space. Outside of class, take the time to carefully read through your classmates’ suggestions. (You may want to print out all of the files so you can look at all of them at once.) If you find one review particularly helpful, you can “accept” the changes made by that reviewer and then begin using that file as your new “master document,” incorporating the suggestions from the other files along the way.

Before you submit your Unit #1 documents, make sure you have “cleared” all of the comments and edits in your documents. To do this, turn on the Track Changes toolbar and either “accept” or “reject” all of changes in the document. Delete any “comments” in the margin by clicking on the “X” in the corner of the comment bubble.