

# Guidelines for Writing a Peer Critique

DH100

1. Go to your classmate's website and print off their paper.
2. Read through your classmate's paper once, without stopping. It is important to get the big picture of the essay before you focus on the individual parts.
3. Re-read the essay with a pencil or a pen in hand and make notes in the margins or between the lines with your thoughts or questions about an author's ideas, organization, or anything else you notice.

**Note:** This stage in the writing process is *not* the time to be proofreading, because the author will probably make major changes to the entire paper, not to mention the individual words and sentences. Focus instead on the paper's organization, paragraph structure, supporting details, etc.

4. Write comments to the author in the form of a **formal letter**. Your response should be approximately one-page long, *single-spaced*. Make your comments as constructive and specific as you can so that the author can use them to improve the paper. Provide positive feedback along with constructive suggestions. **Email the letter to the paper's author, and CC me ([bmatzke@ccsu.edu](mailto:bmatzke@ccsu.edu))** so that I can grade the letter and so that I know the original author received it. In composing your letter, look at the following set of questions. It is not a checklist; rather, it should serve as a useful *guide* for the direction of your comments.

## I. Argument

- What is the essay's argument, and has the author made it clear? Is it appropriate for a paper of this length?
- If the author states the point directly (i.e. has a thesis statement), is it effective? Is the thesis *narrowly focused* enough to be the basis for a detailed argument? Is it clear and compelling? Is it debatable? Does the author simply state the obvious, or offer an original point of view?
- If the author allows the reader to infer the point of the paper, has she or he focused the paper enough to make that point clear?
- Are you convinced by the author's reasoning? Are there any leaks in the logic of the piece? Does the author make any statements without enough supporting evidence?
- Are there places where you felt lost when you read the paper? Are there parts of the paper that you found confusing?

## II. Details and Support

- Does the paper meet the requirements for evidence? Does it cite:
  - At least three primary sources?
  - At least three secondary sources?
  - At least three visualizations?
- Are there ideas that need more evidence, more detail, or more support in order to be vivid or convincing?
- Are there parts of the paper that you thought were irrelevant or repetitive?
- Does any part of the paper depend on overgeneralizations, clichés, or broad moral claims?
- Does the author clearly relate all of the details and supporting evidence to the point of the paper? Were there any parts of the paper where you found yourself unsure how the part related to the whole?

## III. Organization

- Do you think the author presented the material in an effective order? Was there a clear order?
- Do the introduction and conclusion frame the essay effectively?
- Are the author's ideas appropriately organized into paragraphs?
- Does each paragraph work to prove the thesis? How could the author connect unrelated paragraphs to the main argument?

## IV. The Ever-Important Kudos!

- What are the best parts of the paper? What has the author done especially well? What do you think the author should definitely keep in the final draft?

Remember: you shouldn't try to answer all of the above questions in your letters to your classmates. You should, rather, try to highlight those things that would *most improve* their paper, and those points where their paper is *most successful*.

This assignment is due by midnight on December 1. You must complete two letters—one for each member of your peer critique group. Email the letter to the original author, and CC me on the email as well. Bring the marked up hard copies of the papers to class on December 3 to give to the original author as well.