

USING PEER REVIEW TO IMPROVE STUDENT WRITING SUPPLEMENT 2B: GUIDELINES FOR SMALL GROUP WORKSHOP INCLUDING MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS

Guidelines for Small Group Workshop Including Multilingual Students

This supplement is designed to help the multilingual writer see what aspects of the essay need structural revision, without focusing too heavily on grammar, and to rely on L1 writers to suggest possible approaches to the essay's revision. This is a time for L1 and L2 writers to engage in a discussion about writing in an American academic setting, to make the essay as effective as possible.

The Role of the Reader: Preparing your Comments for Workshop

As an L1 audience, your goal is to help the L2 writers achieve their desired reaction to the essay. This is primarily your time to engage with higher order concerns, such as whether the essay answers the prompt in a satisfactory way, whether the writer shows command of the subject, and whether the message is easily understandable. As an L1 audience, ask yourself what you can discuss that will help the L2 writer in terms of purpose, organization, logic, and tone. Do not read your written comments verbatim, but see this activity as a chance for you to refine your writing skills—by helping your peer become more proficient in writing for the American academy, you will also exercise your ability to synthesize and evaluate, thus improving your writing as well.

The Role of the Writer: Workshopping your Writing

L2 writers might have trouble responding well to criticism about writing in English. Writing is a personal act intended to communicate a message, but L2 writers might find it difficult to separate a criticism of the message and a criticism of the language with which the message is conveyed. L2 writers might see it as a personal flaw that their English is not at a native-speaker level, and they might focus on fixing small grammatical errors rather than focusing on bigger rhetorical aspects. Approach the workshop with a rhetorical mindset, rather than a grammatical one. Fixing minor grammatical errors will happen in the revision process; during peer review, focus on the validity of your message. Remember that the session is for your benefit as a writer in a specific academic discipline. Try to set the tone of the workshop by acknowledging some of the grammatical aspects you intend to work on during revision, thus reminding your L1 audience not to focus heavily on those issues. Come up with some higher order concerns that you have: does your essay show that you master the content of the course? Does your essay provide good evidence for your argument? Does your essay follow the argumentative logic usually employed in an American academic community? Try to avoid being defensive, and try to remind your readers that you will work on your grammar at a later stage. Ask for explanation and elaboration, so that you will increase your knowledge of American conventions. Be personal—your readers can help you if you share with them some cultural differences that you notice between your academic past and your experience at U of M.

The Group

Don't work from your written critique. Instead, use your written comments as the basis for discussion. It is important to realize that peer review is primarily a verbal activity. You improve your writing by talking about writing strategies. The group should allow about ten minutes for each paper.