

USING PEER REVIEW TO IMPROVE STUDENT WRITING

SUPPLEMENT 4: STRUCTURED COMMENTING PROTOCOL

Structured Commenting Protocol

When you comment on your peers' drafts this semester, please follow these steps:

1. Read the essay through once, without marking it. It can be helpful to take a few notes while you read.
2. After you've done this, identify the two or three most important "higher order" things you think your peer could improve.

[*Note: "higher order" concerns may include aspects of course content, conceptual understanding, argument, complexity, analysis, use of evidence, development of ideas, organization, understanding of audience, and sometimes diction and tone.*]

3. Construct a head note—a note that you will paste at the beginning of your peer's paper—that does the following: 1) offers a brief but specific description of general strengths, and 2) explains the two or three things to work on in a way that frames your remarks in terms of techniques and strategies to improve for subsequent drafts and assignments (e.g., "you've done an excellent job of..., but two central things to continue to work on are..."). This note will probably be fairly detailed in presenting and discussing these two or three focus areas. It may be helpful to think of this head note as a kind of "roadmap" to the marginal comments you will insert.
4. Finally, go back through the paper and, writing in full sentences, insert selective marginal comments and/or praise to reinforce and exemplify your head note (e.g., "This point is unclear because..." or "You do a nice job here of..."). Give explanation and/or examples when you note both areas to improve *and* areas of strength.

It's fine if the marginal comments reiterate points made in the head note; indeed, they might specifically reference a moment in the head note as a way of reinforcing it ("As I noted in my opening comment, here is a place where..."). Since your head note will be fairly detailed, you will probably need relatively fewer marginal comments to highlight the relevant examples.

5. If you wish to comment on "lower order" concerns (e.g., style, grammar, and/or punctuation), please focus on just one or two patterns encountered throughout the essay, explain these in a separate paragraph of your head note, and mark up only a single representative paragraph in the essay to model corrections. Be aware of the fact that this strategy may be less effective for writers who use English as their second language. Thus, it may be helpful to respond to substantial "grammar issues" by simply pointing out that certain sentences are difficult to understand. Suggest that the writer break these sentences down into several shorter sentences. Each of these shorter sentences should contain a single idea. If you feel comfortable providing a model that the writer can follow in breaking down such sentences, it's OK to provide one sample.