

## **USING PEER REVIEW TO IMPROVE STUDENT WRITING SUPPLEMENT 6: STUDENT GUIDELINES FOR FULL CLASS WORKSHOPS**

# **Student Guidelines for Full Class Workshops**

Full class workshop offers the class an opportunity to learn from each other through exposure to peers' work and thinking critically about revision strategies together. By workshoping your peers you will also improve your ability to revise your own work. The following guidelines provide clear directions for each step of the full-class workshop as well as some general principles to keep in mind during workshop.

### **Preparing for the Workshop**

**Step 1.** The student being workshoped should post their paper on the CTools Forum post by the following deadline: \_\_\_\_\_.

If you are being workshoped, find the forum post labeled "rough drafts" and reply to the post. Label the subject header with your full name and the workshop date, and attach your essay, making sure your paper is double-spaced and in a .doc or .docx format so that others can gain access to it.

**Step 2.** Download the essay of the student being workshoped.

**Step 3.** Read the essay all the way through. Number each paragraph in the essay, then reread the essay, making margin comments based on your reactions. Mark the places where you feel the writer has done something praiseworthy as well as places where you stumble.

#### **Examples:**

This topic sentence doesn't relate to the rest of the paragraph.

A better transition is needed here.

Is this the central argument?

Focus primarily on larger issues in the essay, such as the overall argument, evidence and analysis, and organization. Don't get bogged down in questions about language use, punctuation, or formatting, unless these issues interfered greatly with your ability to comprehend the paper. 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 okay to provide one sample in the margins.

**Step 4.** On a separate sheet of paper (typed, single-spaced), summarize the main idea of the essay in a sentence or two. After summarizing it, critique it. Consider the following questions: Is the argument clear? Is it debatable? Is it too obvious? What could make the argument stronger?

**Step 5.** Make a list of two positive attributes of the essay and two major issues the writer needs to work on. Focus on higher order issues such as argument, evidence and analysis, and organization (do not comment on sentence-level issues, such as grammar and punctuation in your list—these should be left to your margin comments). Be specific in your list and write in full sentences. For example, rather than just saying “improve organization,” let the writer know where organization needs to be improved and why.

## General Questions to Address

The following questions should help you to think about some topics to address in your list. You need not answer all of these questions, but some may stand out as being pertinent to you.

**Development of Central Argument** – Does the essay stay on topic/lose focus at any point? How does the essay evolve? Do you feel you have learned something new/seen the central question from a new point of view?

**Support** – Is there enough evidence to support the central idea? Is all of the evidence relevant to the main idea? Does it need more or less analysis? More or less concrete details?

**Organization** – Are the sentences and paragraphs ordered effectively? Do each of the sentences and paragraphs have a clear purpose? Do they use transitions to create relationships? Do they build well on each other?

**Style** – Does the voice or tone improve the essay or take away from the writer’s credibility? Is the language use appropriate for the audience?

**Step 5:** Bring the marked up essay and your peer review sheet to class on the day of the workshop.

## General Workshop Principles

**1. Start with Concerns of the Highest Order.** All parts of writing contribute to the overall meaning and effectiveness of an essay, from main argument to word choice to use of the semi-colon, but because of the limited time of workshop, focus on the elements considered to be of higher concern first. For example, don’t begin by critiquing comma use; begin with the main argument. Focus on depth of analysis or use of evidence, not typos or punctuation. Once larger issues have been discussed, then look at lower order concerns such as grammar and mechanics.

**2. Use specific examples.** Avoid general blanket statements. Don’t just say “there is lots of evidence,” but say which evidence is successful, which isn’t and why. Point to specific paragraphs (“I can’t follow the argument from paragraph 5 to 6”) or sentences (“I feel like the second sentence in paragraph 5 makes a generalization”). If the writer needs to go deeper, point to the place that left you too much on the surface.

**3. Offer critique, not summary.** It might seem like summarizing what the essay does makes apparent the problems inherent within it, but workshop doesn’t offer enough time for summary. Jump right into specific points and use well-chosen details as a means of evidence for your critique. No need to offer a play-by-play.

**4. Be kind.** It is generally true that people will be more likely to listen to critique when it is paired with positive feedback. Take a moment at the outset or during the workshop to say something positive about the writer's work—what impressed or surprised you? Also, be considerate when offering critique. Put yourself in the writer's shoes.

**5. But, seriously, offer critique.** Writing is an act of discovery, and there is no end to discovery. Aside from a few kudos you feel should be pointed out, the workshop should be focused on what can be improved or explored further. Even if you love an essay, consider further questions you have about the writer's ideas in order to offer him or her a new way of seeing their work (though this doesn't mean being nit-picky!) and developing it.