

## **USING PEER REVIEW TO IMPROVE STUDENT WRITING SUPPLEMENT 7: INSTRUCTOR GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATING FULL- CLASS AND SMALL-GROUP WORKSHOPS**

# **Instructor Guidelines for Facilitating Full-Class and Small-Group Workshops**

Including full-class workshops to peer review student essays in your course can have many benefits. Workshops provide students with the opportunity to use their critical thinking skills to help other students on their writing. They also offer you a chance to use concrete examples to illustrate what makes an essay successful and discuss your expectations for the writing assignment in general. The following guidelines should help you prepare for and execute full-class workshops. These guidelines work well in conjunction with **Supplement 6: Student Guidelines for Full-Class Workshops**.

### **Preparing the Class for Workshop**

You first need to decide what role full-class workshops will play in your class. Will it be an activity you will only engage in once during the term with a sample paper to model small-group workshop methods? Will you ask a student to volunteer to be workshopped by the full-class as a model? Or do you want each student to have a chance to be to have a paper workshopped by the full class? Be sure to structure your syllabus accordingly, as full-class workshops take up significant time (about 20-25 minutes per student). You should plan on only workshopping three to four students per 80-minute class when doing full-class workshops, depending on the length of the essays. If each student will have an essay workshopped once during the term, provide a clearly labeled sign-up sheet at the beginning of the term for students.

#### **Example of Sign-in Sheet:**

##### **Full-Class Workshop Sign-in Sheet**

Please write your name below under one of the dates listed. This will be the day of your full class workshop. Before workshop you will need to post your rough draft on Ctools Forums in the Rough Draft section. Please make note of this in your calendar. No late drafts will be accepted.

##### **Oct 13 – Research Essay**

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Students will need access to each student essay being workshopped (or the sample paper you chose to use) ahead of time so that they can prepare for workshop. This can be done using the CTools system, either by posting the essay in the Resources section or asking students to post their essays on the Forums page as attachments. If you're using Forums, you'll need to create a post for students to respond to that is clearly labeled for rough drafts.

You should offer students written guidelines about how to successfully prepare for and execute workshops ahead of time. Consider using one of the comment guidelines for students provided on the **Using Peer Review to Improve Student Writing** resource. Whatever commenting method you use, it's important that you account for and assess student critiques so that students will see this work as integral to the class. For guidelines on assessing student critiques, see **Supplement 9: "Grading Criteria for Peer Critiques.**

## **Preparing Essays for Workshop**

You will also need to prepare to discuss the essay being workshopped in advance. There are differences between how you might prepare a model essay or an essay written by a student in your class. If you are workshopping a model essay, read through the essay, numbering each paragraph, and highlighting a few key passages that provide concrete examples of successful or unsuccessful moves that you want to point out to students. This will be your reference for the workshop. If you are workshopping a student essay, mark it up as you would a rough draft to hand it back to the student, focusing on three or four key issues. You might also consider writing a head-note or end-note to contextualize the comments. For either essay, make notes about what main issues you will discuss in workshop. If you plan to project the essay on the overhead screen for discussion, consider using an unmarked copy in class so that students can come up with their ideas about the essay before seeing your comments.

When preparing comments, it's important to focus on global concerns, such as the thesis statement, the overall argument, the support of the argument, or the organization. If you would like to discuss sentence level issues, limit your comments to two or three sentences that illustrate common style issues.

## **Discussing Workshop Values and Goals with Your Students**

Before workshop, either on the day of workshop or in a class ahead of time, discuss with the students what makes a workshop successful. You might consider asking students what they would like out of a workshop, or what they consider less desirable, to create an open dialogue about the shared values of workshop. The following are some of the attributes of an effective workshop that you might emphasize:

- Students should begin workshop with positive feedback so that writers can know what they have done well and what their strengths are.
- Students should offer respectful feedback and avoid harsh language or personal attacks.
- Students should offer criticism in addition to general praise.
- Students should focus on global concerns, such as argument and support, before dealing with smaller issues, such as style (in most cases grammar and mechanics should be left for margin comments).

- Students should be specific in their feedback and avoid general comments, such as “the evidence is weak” in favor of specific feedback, such as “the evidence in paragraph 4 could be more reliable.”
- Students should follow up on the comments made by other students during workshop to create a threaded discussion rather than a series of disconnected comments.
- Students should be respectful of writers who use English as their second language. For a handout you can provide to prepare students for working with second-language learners, see **Supplement 2b: Guidelines for Small Group Workshop Including Multilingual Students.**

After this discussion, you might consider handing out **Supplement 6: Student Guidelines for Full-Class Workshop**, which contains information about the key principles that students should keep in mind during workshop.

## Clarifying the Writers’ Role

Before workshop, you should also decide what role you would like writers to play during the workshop. In reader-response workshops, the writer is instructed to remain quiet and take notes so that readers can share their feedback without interference from the writer’s perspective until the end of workshop when the writer can ask questions. However, you might choose for the writer to be more active in their own workshop and allow them to ask questions about their essay either at the start or throughout the workshop.

If you decide that the writer will play an active part in workshop, be sure to discuss with the class the writer’s role, making it clear that the writer should ask open-ended questions about their essay, not defend it. You should provide an example of what a useful question might be, such as “How could I improve the connections between my evidence and my thesis?” and let them know that defensive comments will not be allowed.

If you would like to run a workshop that is primarily focused on creating a dialogue based on questions, see **Supplement 8: Guidelines to The Process for Critical Response.**

## Facilitating Full-Class Workshop: On the Day of the Workshop

**Step 1:** Start workshop off by asking the class to discuss a few positive attributes of the essay in question. If you would like the writer to guide the workshop, you may also allow them to ask a few questions they would like readers to address.

**Step 2:** Begin critiquing the essay by asking students what they thought of the main argument. If student summarized the argument ahead of time, ask a few of them to share their summaries, noting any discrepancies on the board. Discuss what could be done to clarify the argument, making sure to address specific passages from the essay where the argument is weaker or becomes confusing.

The following are some questions that are useful to ask during the workshop about the argument:

- What is the argument?
- Are there any discrepancies between students' impressions of the argument? What are they?
- Is the argument debatable? Why or why not?
- Is the argument too obvious or easily argued? How could it be more complex?
- Does the thesis statement represent the argument made in the rest of the essay? Where are there differences between the thesis statement and the overall argument?
- Are there any confusing aspects of the thesis statement? What are they?
- Does the introduction assist in setting up the thesis statement? How could it do a better job?

**Step 3:** Once the argument has been discussed in full, ask the students what other concerns they brought up in their reviews. For each issue a student shares, try to make sure there are at least three follow-up comments to create a threaded discussion. Ask that students avoid focusing on issues of style and mechanics—if they have comments on these issues, they can make a note in the margins of the paper.

The following are some questions that you might pose to students to foster discussion about major issues in the essay:

- What additional evidence is needed to make the argument stronger?
- Is all evidence analyzed in a way that connects back to the argument? Where is analysis lacking? Where could analysis be improved?
- Are the paragraphs in a logical order? Which paragraphs seem out of order or unnecessary?
- Do any paragraphs lack a clear focus? How could they be more focused?
- Do the transitions between paragraphs help clarify the movements between ideas? Where are transitions needed or how could they be improved?
- (After other global issues are covered) What sentences inhibited your comprehension of the argument?

**Step 4:** Close the workshop by asking the student being workshopped if he/she has any follow-up questions.

**Step 5:** If you are workshopping a few students in one class period, you might consider leaving time at the end of class to cover general issues that came up in all of the essays. For example, if each student had trouble with transitional sentences, you might discuss how to write strong paragraph transitions in general.

A full class workshop generally takes 20-25 minutes per paper.

## Small-Group Workshops

Often instructors will ask students to participate in small-group workshops in addition to full-class workshops. The following are some guidelines to keep in mind when offering small-group workshops.

- It's useful to offer at least one full-class workshop before beginning small-group workshops to model successful practices for workshopping.
- Discussing workshop goals and values should still take place before small-group workshops even if you are not holding a full-class workshop.
- You'll need to decide if students will be reading student essays ahead of time for small groups or reading in class. Reserve reading in class for shorter pieces or sections of longer works.
- Students should still turn in their critiques to you so that you can assess their work.
- On the day of small-group workshops, you should plan to move from group to group, prompting deeper questions or facilitating discussion when differences arise.
- You may collect student critique letters at the start of workshop and skim through them to get an idea of which groups might need more facilitation.
- Consider assigning activities for students to complete when their workshop ends, so that they can make use of class time if they are finished before other groups. See the handout of activities for students to do after workshop **Supplement 1: Exercises for After Workshop**. These exercises might also be useful for students to do at home after workshop.
- After workshop, you can discuss with students how their small-group workshops went and ask if they would like to make any changes or offer any feedback to the class about how to improve small-group workshops.