

Peer Reviewing

Common Pitfalls

A surface-level reading. The greatest compliment you can pay to someone else's writing is to engage with it. Sincerely let the writer know how the text affects you as a reader.

Fear of negativity. If you avoid critiquing, you might make yourself feel better, but you won't help the writer strengthen the text.

Critiquing the person instead of the text. Instead of saying "You're not making sense here," a judgment about the writer, try "This section doesn't make sense to me."

Techniques that Work

Respond as a reader. You don't have to know how a writer should revise something; you just need to know what you like to read. Explain how the text affected you intellectually and emotionally. Be specific. Did you connect with it? Was it dull or confusing in places? Were there sections where you had to work too hard to see the main point or the connections between supporting ideas. Good writing does the hard work for the reader.

Use I-statements. Use I-statements ("I laughed here!" "I get confused here—I had to read this twice") to show the writer how a reader responds to the text.

Dig in. The instructor is going to scrutinize the argument/thesis in the writer's final draft. You'll do the writer a favor if you do the same. Is it sufficiently complex and insightful or simplified and obvious? Can you read it once and summarize the main points? Are you persuaded? Where are the holes? Are there other possible options, counterarguments, or pieces of evidence the writer could have offered? Do you get lost anywhere?

Remember, it's just a draft. The reason why we call them *rough drafts* is because they're still in their formative stages. Remind yourself that a tactful critique of a draft won't upset the writer.

Prioritize. You don't have to mention everything a writer should revise to make an A paper. Simply help writers see how a reader responds to their work so they can focus on 2 or 3 areas to improve in the next draft. That means you'll let some things go. How do you decide which 2 or 3 areas to mention?

- Choose higher-order concerns over lower-order concerns. Focus on issues that impede our understanding of the ideas. Don't worry as much about issues that are more cosmetic.
- Choose recurring issues over isolated issues. Focus on the issues that crop up repeatedly rather than the issues that appear only once.