

Peer-to-peer conversation is a powerful force in student learning. Whether classes are meeting online or in person, there are many ways to facilitate peer-to-peer connections online that will deepen students' engagement with evolving writing assignments. Peer review of works-in-progress, conducted online, offers students the opportunity to see what others' performance looks like, to develop questions about emerging assignments, and to practice discussing how any given piece of work reflects the key learning goals the instructor has identified. While peer review is often conducted in class, online spaces offer many options for writers to share ideas and plan revision.

Benefits of online peer review

- *Flexibility*: when peer review happens online, students can proceed at their own pace. In addition to being able to complete the review activities at a time of their choosing within the window an instructor specifies, students can circle back to complete a review of a slightly late peer submission.
- *Access*: digital texts can be read with screen readers; they can be resized or otherwise modified to become more accessible.
- *Fixed records*: when peer review occurs in online spaces, students have continued access to past reviews. There are no worries about students' losing records of what their peers said about their work, and no worries about the reviews being unavailable when a writer is later working on revisions.
- *Instructor access*. Peer review in online spaces is open for instructor review. When writing groups conduct their work in person, it's hard for instructors to get a good sense of how the groups are operating. The archives of an online peer review can be viewed or visited by instructors, and that offers instructive glimpses of what students are actually doing as they discuss each others' work. This is a valuable opportunity for instructors to see how students understand the learning criteria in action.

Options for online peer review

- **Eli Review**: [Eli Review](#) is a peer review platform designed to support writing classrooms in which peer feedback is a core practice. A subscription service (students pay a modest amount—reduced fees for summer 2020—or institutional subscriptions can be purchased in bulk), Eli Review's format makes it easy for instructors to create writing groups and guide peer review. In addition, Eli Review's tools focus on coaching students to give and get better feedback, while the instructor dashboard aggregates data about each peer review cycle, making it possible for instructors to easily see trends in the class as well as to dive into what students are saying to each other.

Advantages of Eli Review: this stable platform, designed by writing teachers, is built for writing instruction. The interface focuses students' attention on the review tasks assigned by the instructor. Eli Review's data dashboards offer a rich view of how students are learning together.

Disadvantages: cost to students or the campus; some learning curve in terms of learning how it works.

- **Blackboard:** Blackboard's tools offer multiple ways to support writing groups.
 - *Group spaces* offer a private space for each group to work in, and groups have access to a range of Blackboard tools: file exchange, discussion board, and blogs or journals.

Advantages: Using the learning management system students are already familiar with centralizes course activities. The familiar interface makes it easy for students to upload work and comment. Group spaces are visible to the instructor.

Disadvantages: Creating group spaces is not intuitive. The file exchange format privileges one-to-one peer contact, which works against the group sharing impressions and working as a whole group, although it's possible to have groups use a discussion board or group journal to share files and comments as a whole.

- *Discussion Forums* (in the main class discussion forum) can be created for each writing group. Writers can post their work to start a discussion thread, and the rest of the group can engage.

Advantages: Using the learning management system students are already familiar with centralizes course activities. If the discussion forum is a tool already in use, then students will be primed to engage in this space. Students can comment on each others' comments and see all group members' submissions.

Disadvantages: Forums are public to the whole class, which offers less privacy for students discussing works in progress. The interface of the forum doesn't allow the instructor to embed guidance for how the conversation in the thread should unfold (peer review directions may be given, but the discussion forums themselves are free-form and students may ignore the directions)

- *Self and Peer Assessment:* This tool, whose name suggests it would be useful for peer review work, invites students to evaluate submitted work in light of criteria listed.

Disadvantages: the focus on scoring works against the sort of open discussion that usually characterizes formative feedback; it does not permit groups to read everyone's work; it is somewhat confusing to navigate for instructors at first, so the learning curve is considerable. Other components of Blackboard are a better choice, and we include it here only because the name of this tool attracts faculty interested in peer review.

- *Google docs, or Microsoft Word 365:* these collaborative writing spaces are easily available and allow writers to be working in a document at the same time. Writers can share their documents with other members of the peer group (and the instructor, if desired). Commenting tools in both platforms allow comments on drafts.

Advantages: Familiar interfaces allow students to comment at whatever length suits them. Google Docs creates histories of revisions, enabling readers to see how a document has evolved. Microsoft Word 365 is part of UVM's supported software and thus work created there is stored within campus secured online spaces

Disadvantages: Google docs are not spaces within the university's secure servers and privacy settings for google must be considered by each writer. Microsoft Word 365 permits collaborative editing, but doesn't preserve older versions. Collaborative writing spaces function to support composing more than reviewing; the assignment for the peer review must be provided separately. Online comments can be tricky to download or to make visible for some users. Sharing documents also privileges one-to-one exchanges rather than whole group discussion.