

# The Writing in the Disciplines Program

at the University of Vermont

## Principles for Peer Review: Designing for Learning and Community

Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on student learning, although the literature suggests that not all feedback is equally influential. John Hattie's work (build on metareviews of the literature on feedback) suggests that the most influential feedback is that which focuses attention on the gap between an assignment's targets goal and the student's work—in other words, feedback gets at the questions of where am I going? How am I getting there? And where do I go next? How can peer review become a meaningful part of students' learning? Let's begin with these principles, and seek to elaborate them—and add to them—as our work continues:

- **Feedback matters:** Productive responses help writers see how their work is moving toward a clearly defined goal.
- **Feedback should aim to be useful:** The best responses shape future behavior by recommending productive action within an evaluative framework.
- **Editing is not the same thing as reviewing:** There is a time for checking formatting, fixing spelling, and clarifying punctuation. But that kind of work is not the same thing as reviewing work to talk about whether a text is doing what it's supposed to do.
- Peer review needs context: Reviewers aren't considering some abstract nature of "good work." Rather, they are considering whether the work connects with particular criteria for success.
- **Reviewers need to believe in their abilities to give useful reviews.** Reviewers who think that peer review is busy work aren't going to do a good job. Reviewers who think they don't know enough to give feedback won't do a good job, either.
- Instructors need to trust students as reviewers. We need to see the value of peer review.
- **Reviewing is a learnable skill.** The art of giving feedback can be learned—response is a genre, and any genre can be analyzed and described.
- **Reviewing must be taught.** Like any genre, reviewing needs to be explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced.
- **Givers gain:** learning to give useful feedback helps writers. There are layers of value to peer review.
- **Useful feedback is specific.** Generalized praise doesn't shape behavior.
- **Reviewers get better with practice and feedback.** Early peer reviews may not be well-done. With feedback from peers and from us, students can learn to do differently and do better.
- **Students do what we value.** We demonstrate what we value in many ways: how we grade it, how we look at it, how we talk about it. If we don't value peer review, students will notice—and act accordingly.

### Useful background material:

Hattie, J. "Feedback in Schools." In *Feedback: The Communication of Praise, Criticism, and Advice.*, edited by R Sutton, M.J. Hornsey, and K.M. Douglas. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011.

Hattie, J., and H. Timperley. "The Power of Feedback." *Review of Educational Research* 77, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 81–112. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487>

McLeod, M., B. Hart-Davidson, and J. Grabill. "Feedback and Improvement: Becoming a Better Writer by Helping Other Writers." *Eli Review*. Accessed February 3, 2019. <http://elireview.com/content/students/feedback/>