Sharing & Responding, by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, remains the most important and influential guide to respond to peers' writing. Although designed for the humanities, the techniques can be adapted to many disciplines, helping you generate and receive substantive, meaningful response to drafts. Below are my adaptations of their terms and ideas, arranged roughly by stages or phases in the writing process. Try these with roommates, friends, classmates, peers. Mix, match, and adapt at will.

Listening. For a designated time, just listen as the writer reads or talks out ideas. You can nod, or look puzzled, etc., but you can't talk. This is about letting the writer think out loud.

Restating in question form. Restate to the writer, in your own words, what you think the writer is getting at, phrased as a question. You may make inferences or guesses, but you should try to stay true to the writer's ideas. *"So, are you arguing X?—but what about Y, which you also mention?"* or *"So, Chabanov defines the concept of Z as . . . –am I right?"* The question format helps the writer reflect on and perhaps question what they're doing in the draft, rather than only defend it.

Descriptive outline. This is restatement at the global, organizational level. Outine the entire paper, dividing it into sections and naming the function of each paragrah. E.g.: "*<u>Section A</u> is intro: ¶1 provides a hook & defines the problem; ¶2 summarizes prior scholarship & its limitations; ¶3 says how you plan to address the problem & maps out organization. <u>Section B</u> lays out your methods: ¶4 gives key definitions; ¶5 defines source parameters. <u>Section C</u> deals with the first major evidence: ¶6 quotes and summarizes the source; ¶7 analyzes & interprets it; ¶8 brings in a counter-claim & responds to it.*" Don't give advice here, only summary of what you think they are trying to do in each section/paragraph.

Centers of gravity. You identify what felt *to you* the weightiest, stickiest, most important, most interesting, most striking thing about the draft. It could be anything: the central claim, the use of a particular piece of evidence, a scholarly definition, a particular sentence or turn of phrase that struck you as beautiful. This can lead to insights about what the writer is doing most successfully or insightfully, things to develop further in revision.

What is almost but not quite said. This is a great way to tease out larger claims and signal to the writer where you need more information, more explicit logic, or just further elaboration of the claim they are developing. These can be small matters of fact—*"You say the dictator was 'elected'; by whom and how?"*—or larger issues of claim: *"When you say 'these images read like a text,' do you mean they actually have a specific vocabulary and even a grammatical structure? What does that actually look like?"*

Think aloud. This works best with audio recording, but also in person. Read a few sentences or a paragraph at a time, silently or out loud, then stop periodically to describe what you are thinking. These may be statements of understanding or summary, or they may be questions, ideas, or other comments, as above. This can also help with organization—if a question is answered later but the reader is asking it earlier, maybe the answer should move up in the paper. (Duke University's Reader Project draws heavily on this method.)

Believing. Pretend to believe everything in the draft, but try to give the writer more ideas in this direction: better examples they could use, scholarly concepts or arguments that seem to align with their thinking, and idea on helping them convey this more effectively at the sentence level. The point is to cheer them on and help them out, but also to highlight the incompleteness of this kind of positive-only feedback.

Doubting. Pretend to doubt everything—major claims certainly, but even seemingly insignificant statements. Suggest alternate interpretations, counter-examples, and different word choice. Demand verification and more detail. The point is to raise questions they may need to address explicitly in some way, but also to decide what level of response may be needed for each kind of question. For example, some little-known facts may simply need a good citation, but perhaps the central claim needs to accommodate more contradictory evidence known to readers. The "pretending" part is important: you're not attacking the writer, just "playing" devil's advocate for them.

Criteria-based feedback. Here you are following a checklist or rubric provided by your professor, looking for these elements in your peer's draft. For example, the components of the introduction may be assigned (as in my outlining example above). Or there may be specific steps to analyzing the evidence, evaluating options, making recommendations, etc. You may be simply identifying the presence or absence of these elements, or you may be asked to comment on them. For example, you may be asked to reply to the logic connecting evidence to claims.

Style. Is the writer using style that seems appropriate to this discipline, topic, course, and especially this particular genre of writing? Who is the audience? What is the level of formality of the prose? How much individuality or creativity is allowed, encouraged, or discouraged? Is specialized vocabulary (jargon) encouraged or discouraged? Does the writer follow the stylistic standards established by the professor for this piece of writing? E.g., is first person allowed, encouraged, prohibited? Is the passive voice preferred (as in some technical fields) or considered obfuscatory (as in history writing)?

Correctness. Try to separate style choices—which may be determined by the discipline, genre, or even your editor (or professor)—from grammar rules that apply everywhere, such as subject-verb agreement, article usage, commas, punctuation, spelling, and citation format. You can mark grammar errors in early drafts, especially when they confuse meaning, but they are often best addressed separately in final polishing of the draft for submission. See Stanford University's Top 20 Errors in Undergraduate Writing. To help you separate actual rules from grammar "folklore," see Joseph Williams, *Style: The Basics of Clarity & Grace*, ch. 2: "Correctness."

Pragmatics of peer review. There are many ways to assign and configure any of the above, and many ways to support student work along the way. These may be disciplinary or they may play to your own idiosyncratic strengths and preferences as an instructor. Below are some tips from my experience and issues you may want to consider.

"Just in time and just the thing"

Decide what the most important moments are for peer response and which kinds of peer response would be most useful for each of those moments. What disciplinary knowledge can students pick up quickly and use to respond to peers' work? What work can they do that allows you to focus on something else in your own feedback? How should they respond to each other's brainstorming? to early drafts? to near-final drafts?

Assignment sheets

Create a separate assignment sheet for each peer response, describing exactly what you want students to focus on and what format to use. If you have a checklist or rubric, include it. If you want them to mark the peer's draft in certain ways, specify this. Also include format for the exchange and for your documentation If graded, what are your criteria? If students evaluate their peer's response, what format does that take?

Formats of exchange

- **Oral feedback in class**. Best with short writing assignments or with brainstorming, topic development, and proposal phases of larger projects. Also works with oral presentations, but respondants need specific instructions and you'll need a way to ensure everyone participates. Creative formats: paragraph shuffle, describe your peer's evidence, brainstorm your peer's introduction or conclusion.
- **Written feedback in class**. Targeted, focusing on one or two specific elements or aspects at a time. Criteria-based feedback can work well here, as does final editing.
- **Oral feedback outside class**. Requires a reporting mechanism. Perhaps students submit a brief description or list of what they discussed and what questions their peer raised for them. Perhaps they have a checklist they complete during the session and submit to you. They can also record audio feedback and send it as an mp3 file.
- **Written feedback outside class**. Can take place electronically, using comments tools in Word, Adobe Reader, or Google Docs. You can use Blackboard's Discussion Board for file exchange (PDFs work best) and even have Bb keep track of threads for you to check or grade. Some draft/feedback could simply be cut/pasted into the threads, with no attachments. Blogs, wikis, and other tools can also work.
- **Peer/prof meetings and office hours**. Assign written peer response as prep, then have them meet with you and use that written response to lead discussion together about the draft. Meetings could be individual, with writer bringing their peers' responses.

Forming groups

Trios give students two different perspectives, confirming some issues or generating genuine choices from diverse responses. Trios also build in a safety net in case one peer drops the ball. Pairs can work if both hold up their ends of the bargain. You can assign peer groups or let them choose. You can make them commit for the term or require students to change groups for each response. Anonymous feedback can be valuable, but it can also generate unnecessarily harsh critique. In-person feedback likewise can be too light. Students need explicit instruction and limits in either case.

Specificity

Be explicitly clear about what you want, and explain why. It can help to ban specific phrases (e.g., "nice flow," unless they explain exactly what they mean by that) or certain types of response for specific moments of the process. For example:

- I generally ban "advice," except in criteria-based response. Instead, keep readers in the mode of being *readers*, focused on what *they* perceive, how *they* are responding, and how the writing is affecting *them* as a reader. Any advice should be offered only speculatively, in question form, and couched in terms of the readers' perception. E.g.,
  - *"I was confused by this term; in this context, does it mean X or Y?"*
  - *"I was uncomfortable with the word 'slave' here because it hides the person's humanity, though I know you don't mean to do that."*
  - *"I was wondering about X early in your paper, and then you address it later. Do you think it would work better up front? Or is there a reason to save it for later? Maybe I need to know early on that it's coming later?"*

- In early draft stages, I generally ban focus on grammar. Peer readers may silently mark typos they spot along the way. I will do the same and also address grammar individually with each student as needed. If syntax creates confusion, those questions will arise with the techniques above. If style questions arise—first person, passive voice, etc.—we address them in the draft, since those affect interpretation and communication. Later, I have students focus *only* on correcting typos and grammar (and checking citation style), banning all other kinds of feedback.

Evaluating peer response

There are many possibilities: completion credit, criteria-based grades, and grading that takes into account evaluation by the peer who received the feedback. It can be a separate grade or a required component of class participation. The key is to signal its value to students in specific ways.