

Writing Center *Peer Group Checklist*

by Melanie Dawson

Professors often break their classes into small groups that edit drafts of papers; this guide will help you to make thoughtful comments about another's work.

First, read through a group member's essay in order to get a general idea of the writing. Does the essay make sense? Can you, without reading the paper, summarize its main point or points? The paper doesn't have to convince you of a particular viewpoint, but it should seem a thoughtful, coherent piece of writing that you can readily understand.

Answer all questions in the space provided or on a separate page

Thesis (if appropriate for the assignment)

Can you find it? In your own words, write the main point of the thesis here:

Does the thesis state the main idea and some of the reasoning behind that idea? Why or why not?

Support for the Thesis

Is the thesis supported in the body of the paper?

Is there any evidence or support for the thesis that is missing?

Is there any information that contradicts the thesis?

Is all of the textual evidence clearly related to the thesis? If some information is not relevant, can it be cut from the paper? If this information is necessary, how could the writer include it without undercutting his or her main ideas? (Hint: look at transitional phrases within sentences.)

Coherence and Clarity

Do any ideas seem vague? What can the writer explain more thoroughly that would help the reader?

Can you determine the paper's audience?

Is the purpose of the essay clear?

Does the introduction give the reader "clues" about the subject of the essay?

Content

Is the conclusion a conclusion or a mere summary? Does the conclusion refer back to the introduction, helping to round out the essay?

As a reader, do you sense a structure in the paper? Can you determine a logic behind it? Are the ideas easy to follow in their arrangement?

Do the transitions (both between sentences and between paragraphs) help to connect ideas? If not, what other structural changes could the writer make? Would other transitional devices be more appropriate?

If the writer is working with fiction, is the plot summary of that fiction too lengthy? Or does the writer strike a good balance between his or her ideas and details from the story?

Is the paper interesting? What are the most interesting/convincing sections of the paper? How could the writer expand upon these sections or make the rest of the paper as interesting?

Are there sections of the paper that are better written than others? If so, do you think these sections are better focused, with the ideas more completely defined? How can the writer bring the rest of the essay up to this level?

Style

Is the style understandable? Also, is the style appropriate for the intended audience? Are there too many linking verbs (is/are/was/were) in the writing? Check, too, for overuse of the passive voice ("was written").

Is the writer too tentative about her thoughts? Does she rely heavily on phrases such as "I think.." or "It seems" or "approximately"?

Is the research thoroughly documented?

Is the research integrated into the paper, or does it "weigh down" the paper, obscuring the writer's ideas? How could the writer more successfully integrate sources into his or her paper?

Marking the draft

If you are working with a photocopied version of a paper, feel free to write a few comments and suggestions. Careful, don't make the page "bleed" (think what it would look like in red pen).

Important: Always tell the writer why you are marking the paper--make a note in the margin or at the end that explains why you are confused by the sentences or phrases you mark.

Draw a straight line (_____) under words or images that strike you as effective. These words would include strong verbs, specific details, memorable phrases, and striking images.

Draw a wavy line (~~~~~) under words or images that are weak or unconvincing. Put these lines under words the writer repeats too often, ideas that seem vague, flat, or unnecessary.

Put brackets ([]) around sentences or groups of sentences that you think should be combined.

Put parentheses () around sentences that are awkward or don't make sense.