Using Feedback: Get in the Loop!

Writing projects typically involve a step in the process where students provide feedback for each other regarding their writing in peer review work. Students may also receive feedback from their instructors or tutors in the Writing Center. While peer review can be structured to be as productive and effective as possible, some students are unsure about how to go about peer review or why it’s done in the first place. Many teachers explain that peer review is important in the writing process because it shows students other ways to accomplish the assignment. Additionally, peer review gives students a chance to receive constructive, positive comments on their writing from others in the class. Whether from peers or instructors or tutors in the Writing Center, feedback allows students the opportunity to ensure that their writing and their ideas are understood.

When to Ask for Feedback

The “best” time for feedback is all the time! When you’re struggling with just getting started and you’re not sure what to do, visit with a fellow student or tutor and get feedback on your ideas about the assignment. Make sure you understand the assignment correctly; try to outline some strategies for accomplishing the work. Once you develop your thesis statement, share it with a classmate or tutor to determine if it’s clear and effective and that it meets the assignment requirements. Especially once a rough draft is completed, sharing the writing with a peer or tutor can be very helpful. After some revision work has been completed, an early polished draft or near-final draft is also useful for generating feedback. Your peer or writing tutor can help you work through any fine-tuning of your writing. Another useful time to receive feedback? Even after a paper has been graded! A tutor in the Writing Center may not be able to explain why you received the grade you did, but he or she can help you work through your instructor’s comments and find areas to improve for future writing projects.

All feedback should be seen as help to continue developing as a writer.

How to Ask for Feedback in the Writing Center

The most effective way to get feedback from tutors in the Writing Center is to go beyond just asking tutors, “What do you think?” Certainly, tutors will read your work and provide feedback even if you’re not sure what to ask about. However, some specific measures can be taken to generate specific feedback to help you even more.

1. Allow enough time in the writing process for revision so that you can return to the Writing Center after revision work. Sometimes asking for feedback at the last minute may be ultimately frustrating if your paper is due the same day or the following day. Give yourself enough time to work though the tutor’s feedback, so you can also get feedback from your instructor and your peers.

2. Come to the Writing Center with your assignment sheet and any notes from class. Writing tutors usually begin their tutoring sessions by asking about the assignment; providing that information will help the tutor reading your draft to make sure it’s meeting the assignment requirements.

3. Bring some specific questions about your draft when you meet with a tutor. You might ask for help with the order of the ideas in the draft or the use of transitions. Any specific focus will help the tutor concentrate his or her feedback on the areas you’re most concerned about.

4. Remember that writing tutors work with all students in all stages of the writing process. Although sharing your writing can be intimidating, please keep in mind that tutors are trained to work with a variety of writing issues and concerns, and their main goal is to help
Having trouble brainstorming ideas for your English paper? Not sure how to get started on your next writing project in your history class? Need someone to help you think about your organization in your business proposal paper? Visit the Writing Center. Drop in tutoring is available for all your writing needs.

Practice, practice, practice writing. Writing is a craft that requires both talent and acquired skills. You learn by doing, by making mistakes and then seeing where you went wrong.

-Jeffrey A. Carver

Dear Grammar Goddess –

I’m organizing the latest family hike and putting together a list of essential items. However, I’m stuck trying to figure out where to put the colon. I want to write, “The items you will need are: water, sunscreen, snacks, and a light jacket,” but I’m not sure that’s right. Could you explain the use of the colon before my family gets stranded without the necessary equipment?

-- Ready to Hike

Dear Ready to Hike:

The colon can be your friend! It’s one of the easiest punctuation marks to use because it really only has one main function: it introduces. A colon can introduce a word, a phrase, a sentence, a quotation, or a list. In the sentence above, I used it to introduce a short sentence. However, what you should remember is that the statement before the colon should be a complete sentence. For your example, the sentence should be rewritten as, “The following items are needed for the hike: water, sunscreen, snacks, and a light jacket.” Try to avoid placing the colon directly after the verb.

Get to Know CGCC Writing Center Tutors!

Marcie Baptista, a new resident to Arizona, is getting used to the new area. A native Californian, she enjoys the great outdoors and hopes the weather cools down soon so she can get a taste of the Arizona adventures she has heard so much about. Marcie received her MA in English from California State University, Stanislaus in 2006. She has a concentration in teaching ESL and has taught ESL for two years. Marcie is currently teaching at MCC and hopes to bring new insights as a tutor at CGCC. Eventually, Marcie would like to fulfill her dream of returning to Italy as an English instructor and roam the European countryside.

James Berry is a grad student and TA at Arizona State University, where he is pursuing a PhD in linguistics to match the MA he got in 2005. Just ask, if you want to diagram sentences or discuss the history of the English language! He was born in Texas, grew up in Miami, Florida, and now considers himself a near-native Arizonan after nearly 14 years in the Valley. His undergraduate degree was in British Literature from the University of Florida - Go Gators! He also was a professional proofreader for 10 years. Needless to say, he loves words! He also remembers some painful moments (some of them were quite recent, actually) as he was learning the writing process. His goal is to help students enjoy and appreciate the process themselves.

Kat Brenner, who has experience teaching at both the high school and college levels, is excited to come back to her roots of working in the writing center. She enjoys tutoring because it blends two of her favorite passions: teaching and writing. She believes that each person has something to share with the world that no one else can share, and she considers it an honor to empower people as writers so they can give voice to their thoughts and ideas.

After just moving back to the Grand Canyon state from New York's Hudson Valley, Andrea Ditter is in her first semester teaching and tutoring at CGCC. She earned both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English Literature from the State University of New York, College at New Paltz where she began her teaching career two years ago. A former college athlete and competitive swimmer for over 15 years, Andrea also coaches for the Rio Salado Swim Team's Hamilton Hurricanes and spends her free time running around the house after her new puppy, a beagle named Harley.

Jennifer James has been teaching English for 15 years, and received both her B.A. (Psychology) and M.A. (Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English) from The University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona. She has taught for six years at the U of A, and nine years at the Community College and university levels. She has also facilitated professional development sessions for fellow teachers in the area of secondary ELL instruction. Her plans are to obtain a Ph.D. in education and implement practical and applicable college learning programs for ELL students which are closely linked to professional growth.

Marlene Montgomery, a 1998 CGCC graduate, recently earned her MA in English from ASU. An experienced volunteer and private tutor, Marlene finds working with students both challenging and rewarding. She looks forward to talking with CGCC students about the struggles of filling white space and the satisfaction of writing well. She claims that it’s a rare occurrence to come across a writing blunder she hasn’t committed. Most of her quality free time is spent traveling with her husband, reading, and writing.

The Archives

For more great information and handy writing tips, check out earlier editions of Writing Right @ CGCC, available at: www.cgc.edu/learning/center/newsletter.shtml

Writing a Critical Analysis: How pizza can help (February 2006)

Say What? Decoding your instructor’s assignment sheet (Sept/Oct 2005)

Taking the Mystery Out of Citing Sources (April/May 2005)

Organization… not just for closets! (February 2005)

Getting Started (October 2004)

Concluding Thoughts (May 2004)

You Never Get a Second Chance to Make a First Impression (April 2004)

Why Can’t We All Just Get Along? The Art of Argumentation (February/March 2004)

Inaugural Issue (December 2003)
Prewriting: The Best Place to Start is to Start

Many students come to the writing center even before they start writing anything down. The question they ask is, “Where do I start?” My response is usually, “The best place to start is to start.” Start writing anything. After all, most good writing happens during revision. Here are some things you can try to get started:

• Try freewriting. Take a couple of pieces of paper and just start writing anything. It doesn’t matter if you repeat yourself or if it doesn’t make much sense. The process of writing down your ideas as they come to you may help you organize them later.

• Make a cluster-map. Some students don’t like the idea of starting to write in sentence form. For them, brainstorming by writing down related ideas in clusters can help.

This is especially helpful to find out if your topic is too broad.

• Start outlining. Once you have your ideas pretty well worked out in your head and (if needed) you have most of your research done, outlining can help you get started actually writing. Start with a simple outline and make it more detailed as things occur to you, this way you can make sure the overall structure of your paper is cohesive.

• Ready, set, WRITE! Sometimes picking a portion of your paper and just writing it out can be the best thing. For example, writing a thesis statement can help you get a better idea of how the rest of your paper should progress. Do you have a good idea about what you are going to say about the history of your topic? Start there and fill in around it later. You don’t have to start with the introduction and end with the conclusion—in fact, sometimes it’s better not to!

As you experiment with different methods of prewriting, you will find what works best for you. Sometimes different methods work for different types of writing; the creative writing process can be very different than writing a research paper. The most important thing to remember in prewriting is to relax and let the ideas start forming on paper. Then you’ll have something to work with later.

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Did You Know?

What makes a word “beautiful”? In 2004, the British Council surveyed over 40,000 people to ask what they considered to be the most beautiful words in the English language. The top choice was “mother.” This is the list of the top twenty most beautiful words, as determined by the British Council Survey:

1. Mother
2. Passion
3. Smile
4. Love
5. Eternity
6. Fantastic
7. Destiny
8. Freedom
9. Liberty
10. Tranquility
11. Peace
12. Blossom
13. Sunshine
14. Sweetheart
15. Gorgeous
16. Cherish
17. Enthusiasm
18. Hope
19. Grace
20. Rainbow

For more information, visit http://www.britishcouncil.org/home-70-beautiful-words.htm.