Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip

Teaching with Writing

Arranging Virtual Peer Response

Rationale: In addition to enhancing students' understanding of course content, writing processes, and how readers might interpret students' writing, peer response underscores students' participation in a community of writers and readers. Virtual peer response can be used effectively in face-to-face classrooms, online courses, and in hybrid models. Maximize benefits by providing clear guidelines and expectations for writing peer comments in virtual environments.

Define Peer Response
Clear up any possible misconceptions of peer response with this video from the University of Minnesota's department of Writing Studies. The video introduces and defines peer response processes, and could be embedded within a course Moodle site or projected during class time.

Design a Process/Space for Peer Response Activities
Virtual peer response can be facilitated through Moodle: students can upload drafts to a designated, small-group Moodle forum; Moodle's "Workshop" is another option. Virtual peer response can occur in Google Docs, wherein peers can insert comments, questions, and other responses to drafts. Alternately, the open-source Pirate Pad allows writers and readers to chat in real time; this tool includes a "time slider" which will reveal how the writer revised the draft subsequent to peer reviewers' comments.

Make Your Expectations Explicit
Keep students on task with written guidelines for the peer response process. Take time to define or discuss relevant terminology (Bernhardt, 2006). Do you want students to provide substantive responses, including revision suggestions? To ask questions as an interested reader? To respond directly to writers' self-identified concerns and questions? To summarize the drafts' major strengths and areas for revision/elaboration? To apply the assignment grading criteria to the draft, such that the writer gains a clearer sense of how well the draft meets those criteria?

Emphasize the benefits of balanced, strategic, and specific comments. Balanced comments identify and describe both the draft's accomplishments and the draft's missteps. Strategic responses--questions, suggestions, and observations--encourage the writer to refine the draft in helpful ways; specific comments help the writer perceive the draft through peers' astute observations.

The November 2013 TWW Tip can help you make your expectations clear. You might also consider sharing the Commenting Strategies video.

Build the Response Process into the Course
Well-designed and intentionally-sequenced virtual peer response activities enhance student learning and helps instructors manage the paper load, especially in large-enrollment courses. The first round of peer response, for instance, could ask students to focus on "global" issues such as audience, clarity of purpose, and organization; the second round (on a revised draft) could focus responses on sentence-level concerns. Ask writers to consider peers' responses carefully and deliberately, and to address those responses in a revision memo. Finally, consider the possibility of making peer response a portion of the assignment's grade.

Learn more:
- Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom.* 2ⁿᵈ ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.
- Bernhardt, Stephen A. Creating Effective Peer Review Groups to Improve Student Writing. Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse, 2006.
- Creating Effective Peer Response Workshops (University of Minnesota)
- Kastman Breuch, Lee-Ann. *Virtual Peer Review: Teaching and Learning about Writing in Online Environments.* Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 2004.
- Peer Response Groups (George Mason University)
- Voice Thread (offering Voice Thread Comments in Moodle) and Voice Thread information for instructors
- Guide to Writing Peer Reviews (University of Wisconsin)

Questions? Visit us online at http://writing.umn.edu/tww/index.html

Check out this semester's Teaching with Writing events: Log in to your ULearn account: ulearn.umn.edu. Use the search for C4W to view all events hosted by the Center for Writing.

Further support: Contact a member of the WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) team for a phone, email, or face-to-face teaching consultation: http://z.umn.edu/twwconsultation

Our purpose is to provide practical strategies for teaching with writing. Our goal: to offer timely and pragmatic support to faculty members and instructors who teach with writing in undergraduate and graduate courses in all disciplinary areas.

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