

How to Write a Helpful Peer Review

Peer review is not about grading, fixing, or judging someone's writing.
It is about **helping a real reader understand, engage with, and improve a draft**.

A good peer review is **specific, constructive, and respectful**.

What a Good Peer Review Does

1. Reads Like a Real Reader

- Responds to the draft as someone encountering it for the first time
- Notes **where you were confused, interested, persuaded, or unconvinced**

2. Focus on Big Ideas First:

- Thesis or main claim: Is it clear and specific?
- Organization: Does the structure support the argument?
- Evidence: Is there enough support? Is it relevant?

Grammar and sentence-level edits matter—but **not before the ideas are working**.

3. Is Specific and Evidence-Based

Avoid vague comments like:

“This is confusing.”, or “Good paragraph.”, or “You need more detail.”

Instead, point to *where* and *why*:

- “In paragraph 2, I wasn’t sure how this example supports your claim.”
- “The transition between paragraphs 3 and 4 felt abrupt because...”

4. Offers Suggestions, Not Commands

Your role is to **advise, not rewrite**.

- Ask questions instead of giving orders: “*What would happen if you...*”, or “*Could you clarify...*”. Offer options, not single “right answers”

The writer decides what changes to make.

5. Balances Strengths and Areas for Improvement

A helpful review includes:

- What is **working well**
- What could be **clearer, stronger, or more developed**

Naming strengths helps writers **keep what works**, not just fix what doesn't.

What a Peer Review *Should Avoid*

-  Editing every sentence for grammar
-  Rewriting the paper in your own voice
-  Being sarcastic, dismissive, or vague
-  Focusing only on what's "wrong"

Useful Sentence Starters

- "As a reader, I understood your main point to be..."
- "I was most convinced by..."
- "I got confused when..."
- "You might consider expanding..."
- "One question I still have is..."

A Simple Peer Review Checklist

Before submitting your review, ask:

- Did I respond as a reader, not a grader?
- Did I focus on ideas before grammar?
- Did I give specific examples?
- Did I include both strengths and suggestions?

Remember:

Good peer review helps *both* the writer and the reviewer become better writers.