

Peer Review Instructions

Most writers depend on feedback to improve their work. Many writers also learn from reading and commenting on other authors' drafts. Approach this assignment with the intention of making constructive criticisms; that is, helping another author improve his or her paper.

The point here is to help your classmate, not to produce a document of a certain length. That said, I think a good ballpark guideline would be **2-3 single-spaced pages**. Going over the limit is not a problem, so don't waste time cutting back if you do. If you think it would be helpful, schedule a Zoom or face to face meeting with the person whose paper you are reviewing to discuss your review. This is not required, but sometimes such a dialogue can be even more useful than a written critique.

Before marking up the paper – you can use “Track Changes” or type edits on google docs or print a copy and give hand-written comments – read it through once in its entirety so that you get a general feel for it. Make sure you understand the paper before critiquing it. If, after a careful reading and re-reading, you still cannot understand what the author is saying, say so (and point out where and why). As you write your critique and mark up the paper, keep in mind the following:

- 1) be fair and charitable, but honest;
- 2) be specific, identifying by page numbers and/or quotation the exact sections of the paper that you are referring to with your comments, criticisms, compliments, objections, and recommendations;
- 3) focus on substance, and only secondarily on prose style, except to point out places that are not clear. Do not correct every grammatical or spelling error. If certain errors recur or seem particularly problematic, call attention to them generally.

Keeping all this in mind, and in addition to any marginal comments you make, answer the following questions in your written peer review:

1. What is the **thesis** of this paper, and is it clearly presented near the beginning? (In answering, write out the thesis as you understand it and make suggestions if it is too vague or awkward.)
2. How effective is the introduction? Does the introduction provide an adequate roadmap of what the paper will discuss? Does it provide necessary background information? What could be done to improve it?
3. Is the paper well organized? Does each paragraph act as an integral part of a unified presentation? Would you make any organizational changes? Are there any ideas, paragraphs, or sentences that could (or should) be cut out of the

paper? If there are passages where you are not sure what the evidence being introduced is supposed to be telling you or why it is important to the argument, say so. Occasionally, what we as writers assume is clear is in fact only implicit, and we need a "fresh set of eyes" to tell us "you didn't quite make the connection between your evidence and your argument."

4. How effective is the conclusion? What could be done to improve it? Does it make clear the significance of the analysis – does it, ultimately, make the case for why “this is a story worth telling”?
5. What three things do you like best about this paper?
6. What three things would you improve? (In answering, remember to offer realistic suggestions – improvements that can be made over the next two weeks.)
7. What questions do you have about the paper? What more do you need to know?
8. What is especially interesting about this paper? After reading it, what do you most clearly remember about it?

Email your peer review and comments to the author whose draft you have read and to me by Wednesday, April 30th. If this deadline proves impossible, do try to get the peer review to us by Friday, May 2nd at the very latest.