Writing Response Groups

From Peter Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers*
Why Groups Work

- Students must have a draft before their final paper.
- Students have a response to their drafts before they revise.
- Students have a real audience.
- Students begin to hear themselves—and their “voices” as they read aloud.
- Students begin to learn what they do well as writers.
Why Groups Work

• Students develop a standard of good and bad written expression.
• There is group pressure to master what everybody else has mastered.
• There is group pressure not to bore people.
• Groups are supportive, non-threatening, and cooperative.
Forming Groups

• Teachers should determine group configurations.
• Groups should have at least three members, but (because of time constraints) probably no more than five.
Forming Groups

• If possible, groups should be mixed demographically.
• Groups should work together over an extended period of time in order to develop a climate of trust.
• Groups do not need to stay together for an entire year.
• Students often need to be trained in appropriate and useful group interactions.
Response Group Logistics

• Each group should choose a leader/timekeeper to keep group members on schedule and handle any administrative issues. This can be a temporary position.

• Writers should have at least 15-20 minutes for responses to their work.

• Use the last five minutes for groups to evaluate and critique their experiences.
Procedure for Teacherless Response Groups

1. The writer reads his or her work aloud while the group “listens hard.”

2. The writer pauses for a minute. During this time, group members jot notes on parts of the writing that resonated for them.
Procedure for Teacherless Response Groups

3. After one minute, the writer reads again. Group members take notes during this reading. When finished the group members take several minutes to add to their original notes.
**Procedure for Teacherless Response Groups**

4. Each group member, in turn, gives his or her response. The writer offers no apologies, explanations or comments in return, but listens carefully and takes notes on the responses. It is possible (and likely) that several group members will have some of the same responses. Each should articulate them.

5. At the end of each response, the writer should say, “Thank you.”
Group Guidelines

• Everyone must read.
• Everyone must comment.
• Everyone must have the same amount of time.
• Participants must read aloud.
• Participants must take notes on what they hear from responders.
The Responses

• Each person responds in turn to the piece of writing he/she just heard.
• Each person responds fully with no interruptions.
• The writer does NOT respond to comments.
• The writer takes notes on the responses.
• A person responding should say EVERYTHING he/she intended to say, even if it repeats what has already been said.
How to Respond

1. SUMMARYING Try to state in one or two sentences what the selection was about.
How to Respond

2. POINTING

Identify words or phrases that “stuck” ...things you responded to. Also, this is a place to mention things that “bothered your ear.”
How to Respond

3. TELLING

Relate what happened to you as you heard the piece. Try to give the writer a “movie of your mind” as you listened to the reading.
How to Respond

4. SHOWING

Use metaphors to get a levels of meaning or feeling that are not easily verbalized. (e.g. “If this writing were music, it would be…”).