PEER EVALUATION

PURPOSE
Peer evaluation can increase both the amount and timeliness of feedback for student assignments. Furthermore, it develops critical-thinking skills of students as they learn to evaluate others’ work.

DESCRIPTION
While there are many ways to structure peer evaluation, all are based around the evaluation of an assigned project. Such projects can vary from creating a composition for a music class to crafting a piece of furniture in wood shop. The process generally includes the following aspects:

- **Training.** Basic principles of good form are taught and illustrated with examples in advance so students can keep these principles in mind as they work on the assignment.
- **Project assignment.** A project is designed that allows students to practice applying the principles taught.
- **Trading.** Projects are collected and redistributed so they can be analyzed by other students (often with anonymity).
- **Assessment.** Students evaluate the work using a rubric. This set of criteria is based on the principles of good form previously taught. It provides a grading scale that allows students to score the work or provide some other form of feedback.
- **Appeals.** Students who feel their work was assessed incorrectly can have their work reviewed by you personally.

EXAMPLE
The following basic steps are used in BYU-Idaho English composition courses where students regularly evaluate the writing of their peers.

**Evaluation Criteria**
First, evaluation criteria are taught to the students in advance, illustrated with several examples from their own writing and the writings of others. For example, a personal narrative may have the criteria of imagery, climactic scene, coherence, and theme. An argumentative essay may simply require logos, ethos, and pathos. Criteria such as grammar are not used since some students may not know how to recognize and evaluate particular grammar errors.

**Process**
Papers in one section are evaluated by students in another section. When students evaluate papers in their own class, the grades tend to be inflated. Students can use a pen name, while the instructor keeps a master list of real names/pen names for record keeping.

**Evaluations**
Students are divided into groups of three. Each group is given three papers from another class. These papers are silently read by all three students, with each student serving as “scribe” for one of the three papers. On the back of the paper, the student writes the group’s collective comments for each category. After filling the page with comments, both complimentary and critical, the group discusses a grade which is to be based on the reasoning articulated in the comments.

The grade given by the group is the grade the instructor puts in the grade book. Instructors have found that the grade must be binding. Otherwise, the students see that it is merely an exercise and don’t take it seriously.

TIPS
- **Provide incentives.** Students must have reason to invest their time in giving good feedback. One way to do this is to have the grades they assign actually affect the grade of another student. Another is to have student assessments reviewed/graded.
- **Maintain anonymity.** The more anonymous the review, the more likely students are to give critical feedback. Because students feel a loyalty to their classmates, grade inflation is decreased by assessing the work of students in other sections.
- **Explain the reliability of the process.** Students might not initially trust the feedback of their peers. Research has shown that well-designed peer evaluations are generally valid, so develop evaluations in such a way that students can feel comfortable with the results. If students have concerns, explain that they can appeal the score.

http://www.byui.edu/learning-and-teaching/instructional-tools
with the instructor.

- **Provide a safety net.** A no-risk appeal process can be very helpful in making students feel comfortable about appealing. This comfort is achieved because they know that they may get a higher, but not a lower grade. In this process however, a 24-hour “cool-down” period is recommended and some type of investment by the student (either a written request or personal appointment with you) will help decrease unwarranted appeals.

**PITFALLS**

- **Not letting go.** Instructors must be willing to step back from being the “expert” so that students have the opportunity to judge and critique each others’ work.

- **False perceptions.** Peer evaluation may be viewed as a method that faculty use to get out of their work to provide feedback. Unless time is taken to explain how this approach permits faculty more time to teach and intervene at key moments while allowing more student feedback in a timely manner, students will become reluctant to evaluate one another seriously.

**KEY ARTICLES**


**OTHER NAMES**

Peer Review, Peer Feedback, Peer Grading, Peer Critiques, Students Rating Students, Peer Scoring, CPR- Certified Peer Review

**OTHER RESOURCES**

- Exploring Teaching Examples: Peer Review