

MERRIMACK COLLEGE WRITING CENTER

PEER REVIEW GUIDE FOR ACADEMIC PAPERS

Peer Review can be conducted in many ways. The strategy explained here focuses on getting the global issues in order, and works well after the first draft, but before editing.

First Read

On your first read, get an overall sense of the paper.

- **Form:** Is this a specific type of paper, such as a lab report? If so, does it conform to that genre? Check the syllabus to determine if there are specific guidelines for the content and organization of the paper, and check to make sure those are followed as well.
- **Style:** Is this paper to be written in a specific type of documentation, such as APA, MLA, or CMS? If so, does it follow the conventions of that style? If you don't know the conventions of that style, you may need to look it up! Mark accordingly.
- **Audience:** Write the author's intended audience in the margin at the top of the paper. If you cannot determine an audience, ask the author who the intended audience is. Consider all your feedback in light of that audience's knowledge and expectations.
- **Purpose:** Write the author's purpose in the margin at the top of the page. If you cannot determine a purpose, ask the author what the intended purpose is. Together, audience and purpose drive all choices, from thesis, to tone, to point of view, to selection and presentation of evidence.

Second Read

Once you have established a baseline understanding of the text, spend more time analyzing what was done, in light of what you have just discovered.

- **Thesis:** Is the thesis explicit or implied? Does the overall paper organization speak to a logical overall argument? If not, where does it fall short, and why?

Thesis, when present, is made of three parts: subject, purpose, and opinion. Examine the introduction and conclusion to see if there is a single sentence with these parts that drives the whole essay, and mark it for the author.

- **Organization:** How is the paper organized? Write in the margin what each paragraph of each section does. If the paragraph has no purpose, create one for it—advise the author of what he or she might do to make the paragraph effective in forwarding the argument.
- **Development:** Every academic paragraph contains three parts: claim, evidence, and discussion. The claim is the purpose of the paragraph. Evidence is the proof (it could be personal, or it could come from sources). Discussion is how the author ties the evidence to the claim to the thesis. Check that every paragraph does these things, and mark down where they are, and if they are missing.
- **Introduction & Conclusion:** Identify whether or not the form, style, or essay guidelines require a particular kind of introduction or conclusion, and mark them accordingly. The two work together, the introduction creating a hook leading to the thesis and the conclusion reiterating the lesson of the paper presented in a new light. If the introduction and conclusion do not do this, advise your author on suggestions for improvement.

Third Read

Identify three things that are well done in the paper. Mark them with a symbol (a star or smiley face usually work), and explain why. Now, if there is time, you're ready to read for editing suggestions—grammar, spelling, etc.

