Peer Review Techniques Handout

Believing
Ask: “Pretend you believe everything I’ve written and that you agree with it – give me more evidence, arguments, and/or ideas to help make my case better.”

Doubting
Ask: “Try to doubt everything I have written; find all the arguments that can be made against what I’ve written” or “pretend to be someone who hates my writing – what would you notice?”
Use these especially for persuasive pieces to help develop and enrich the argument further.

Skeleton Feedback
Ask: “lay out the reasoning you see developing in my paper (main point, sub-points, supporting evidence, and/or assumptions about audience) or “please write “says” and “does” statements for each paragraph/statement/section of my whole paper.”
A “says” statement summarizes the meaning or message, and a “does” statement describes the function. Use these early to figure out what to say, emphasize, or to examine organization and logic. Use these for later drafts to test reasoning and organization.

Criterion-based Feedback
Ask the reader to give thoughts like: “does this sound too technical?” or “do my jokes work for you?” or “do you feel I’ve addressed the objections of people who disagree?”
Develop your own versions of these questions to focus on specific aspects of your piece, or for a quick overview of its strengths and/or weaknesses. Note: this may require readers who are experienced in giving good feedback.

Reply
Ask: “what are your thoughts about my topic?” or “now that you’ve heard what I had to say, what do you have to say?”
Use these when you are still working out your thinking to invite a small discussion on the topic.

Pointing
Ask: “which words or phrases or passages somehow strike you/stick in your mind/come through clearly?”

Center of Gravity
Ask: “which sections somehow seem important or resonant or generative?”
Use these for early drafts to reveal rich and interesting parts of your text that could be developed or explored further.

Summary
Ask: “please summarize what you have read/heard, and tell me what you find to be the main point and the almost-main points.”

Sayback
Ask: “please say back to me in your own words what you see me getting at in this piece.”
Use these at any stage to check if readers are “getting it,” or when you are still figuring out what you want to say.

Almost said/Hear more about
Ask: “what is almost said?” or “what do you want to hear more about?”
Use these at any point when you are wanting to develop or enrich a piece of writing.

Voice
Ask: “is my language alive and human? Or is it dead/bureaucratic/unsayable?” or “what kind of voice to your hear in my writing? Timid? Confident? Sarcastic? Pleading?” or “what kind of person does my writing sound like? or “do you trust the voice of the person you hear in my writing?”
Use these at any stage to get at the subtleties of language, approach, and style.

Movies of the reader’s mind
Ask: “tell me honestly, and in detail, what is going on in your mind as you read my words.”
You might do this by interrupting the reader at specific moments in your paper. If the reader uses “It-statements” (“It was confusing”) ask him/her to switch to “I-statements” (“I felt confused starting here because...”). This will help you see how your paper works on a reader, and can be used at any stage.

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Peer Review Techniques Handout

As you read through your peer’s paper, use the +, -, and ? symbols to mark areas of strength, opportunity, and confusion. Try and pinpoint where you feel each area begins and ends. Try and find one or two areas in the text for each type of comment suggested below. As you read, think about the following questions...

*Ask yourself why does this particular part in the text stand out? What is it doing in the text?*
*What could be done to revise or clarify this section?*
*How can an area that’s strong be used as a an example of what is working in an area that may have an opportunity for revision?*

**Areas of Strength**

- Areas of Strength are those areas in the text that feel strong.
- Mark Areas of Strength with a + symbol.
- Why does the particular area of text feel strong?
- Why does the particular text stand out?
- Pinpoint where the strong writing begins and ends.

**Areas of Opportunity**

- Areas of Strength are those areas in the text that don’t feel strong.
- Mark Areas of Opportunity with a - symbol.
- Why does the particular text stand out?
- Pinpoint where the strong writing begins and ends.

**Areas of Confusion**

- Areas of Strength are those areas that feel confusing or unclear.
- Mark Areas of Confusion with a ? symbol.
- Why does this area feel confusing or unclear?
- Pinpoint where the strong writing begins and ends.
- What could make this part more directed, focused, or clear for the reader?