

WHAT GOOD PEER RESPONSE LOOKS LIKE

1. Good Peer Response Is Human.

The best peer responders don't approach papers as a game of find the errors. They instead respond in a warm and welcoming way that lets the reader know that a human being is on the other end. Further, they put just as much emphasis on the strengths, because these are useful for the author to know and build on. Taking a human tone that looks at positives as well as negatives also matters because it opens the author up to your suggestions; if you don't do this, there is a good chance your partner will close up and disregard your feedback.

2. Good Peer Response Is Specific.

Giving vague responses to a partner (e.g., saying that a paper is "good" or "needs better flow") is often not very helpful because those statements are far too broad. The best reviews are specific and precise. They offer suggestions such as "All the sentences in your last paragraph were pretty short, which makes this feel a bit choppy. Try making at least one of them longer to give it a more polished flow."

3. Good Peer Response Prioritizes the Key Things.

Because the goal of peer response is to help your partner improve his or her writing, it is best *not* to focus on every little issue. (Editing and proofreading come later in the process once all the bigger issues are sorted out.) At this stage, the writer wants you to focus on ideas, organization, word choice, details, and structure, and it is important not to go into too many of these things. The human brain can only absorb so many new things at once, and when we try to tackle too much, we often don't hit anything at the depth needed for the writer to truly address it.

4. Good Peer Response Isn't About Giving All the Right Answers

Your job as a peer responder is not to fix a paper. It is to give the author your perspective as a reader. With that in mind, don't feel like you need to always give

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answers. Often a thoughtful question about something you don't understand or just stating your experience as you read can be more powerful and useful than seeking ways to do the author's work for them. For example, if you are confused by what the writer's argument is, you don't need to try to give them one; instead you can just say, "I'm having trouble finding a single argument that ties this together. What would you say your central argument is?"

5. Good Peer Response Trusts Itself.

You might not be an English language arts teacher, but you know when words or phrases sound wrong, when the organization of a paper confuses you, and when you are interested and/or persuaded or not. Trust that your observations are valid and worthwhile; I promise they will be!

FIGURE 5.4 • The Five Keys for Quality Peer Response