18 The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Peer Review

Erin E. Kelly

Overview

Academic writing classes regularly require students to engage in peer review: that is, to read and comment on classmates' work in progress in an attempt to make that work better.[1] This chapter shows how such class activities connect to the practices of academic peer review associated with academic publishing. Understanding student peer review as an apprentice version of an academic journal's peer review process (and using the problematic feedback offered by "Reviewer Two" as a negative example) can help students learn to generate constructive criticism; plan and undertake beneficial revisions guided by readers' comments; and, most importantly, see peer review and revision as key elements of writing processes at all levels.

Introduction

"Peer review" is a term students hear in a couple of different contexts in my writing classes. I say we're doing peer review when I require my students to offer feedback on their classmates' (in other words, their peers') work in progress. That feedback can be provided in the classroom after students swap paper copies of drafts, or electronically through a shared repository of documents that allows for commenting, like an online course site or Google Docs. Your instructor might call this same activity – whether it takes place in class or as homework, in person or online – a shared peer response or a draft workshop.

I also use the term "peer review" when we talk about research. I remind students that if they are seeking high-quality, authoritative academic sources for a research paper or annotated bibliography assignment, they should prioritize peer-reviewed journal articles. Many university libraries allow students to limit their search for articles to "peer-reviewed" materials.

Is there any connection between these two ways that the phrase "peer review" pops up? If so, what's the association? And why should you care? This chapter answers all these questions not just because it's useful to have a broad understanding of peer review (although it is). Crucially, I think learning how to engage in peer review – both as a reviewer offering comments and as a writer responding to reviewers' feedback – is the best way to improve your writing. Peer review develops a piece of writing by connecting its ideas and expressions to a community committed to making it the best it can be, to ensuring it is accurate, ethical, and effective. In other words, peer review is good.

But before we get to what I believe are the benefits of peer review, I need to admit to something kind of ugly: everyone I know has strong feelings about comments they have received on a piece of their writing. Often that's because they've had a painful experience. It's not uncommon for my university faculty colleagues to quote a sentence that a teacher wrote on an essay – possibly in red ink decades in the past – as evidence that they are hopeless at introductions, or unable to summarize clearly, or possibly just not good at writing. And I regularly hear students say they worry about giving honest feedback to a classmate because it will hurt the peer author's feelings.

So, even as I insist that peer review is good, this chapter isn't going to pretend that it always feels good. I'm going to show you a warts-and-all picture of how peer review works for academic writers who publish their research. Done badly, peer review can upset a writer and even damage their writing. But done and used well, it is an effective way to strengthen a piece of writing.

By giving you an honest sense of how academic peer review works, I hope to share some insights about not just why your writing instructor requires peer review but also why even much-published writers make themselves vulnerable by inviting feedback from peers. Along the way, I show how you can make peer review a good experience.

Professional Academic Peer Review

Like your college instructors and university professors, I am an academic writer. All of us have produced complicated undergraduate research essays and most likely completed lengthy master's and doctoral thesis projects. Many of us have also published journal articles or book chapters, and some have even written entire books. These academic publications have gone through the formal process that gets referred to as peer review. (The chapter you're reading right now is one such piece!)

I also have a special perspective on peer review because I serve as an editor for *Early Theatre,* a peer-reviewed academic journal.[2] That means I get to see articles submitted by authors that they want us to consider for publication. I know from the inside the process of picking reviewers for those submissions. I witness how comments from reviewers can lead to great revisions and better publications. And I think a lot about how the peer-review process shapes research.

Even if you don't plan on doing academic writing, much less publishing in peer-reviewed publications, in your own future career, it's useful for you to know about how peer review works beyond the writing classroom. Peer review isn't just a way to make a piece of writing better. It's the foundation for how the research you read about in your textbooks and study in your classes gets tested. It's also the process for authorizing the accuracy, originality, and quality of a piece of writing that shares new and developing knowledge with a larger community. For the rest of your life, medicines you take, technologies installed in the vehicles you drive, and the topics that get taught in your kids' schools will emerge out of research that was peer reviewed.

Briefly, here's how peer review for academic publication generally works.[3] Imagine that Professor Good-Idea comes up with what they think is an exciting new thesis or important discovery. (This key finding would vary based on this person's academic discipline. For a field biologist, it could be the identification of a new species of woodpecker. For a philosopher, it could be an interesting approach to evaluating truth claims.) They want to offer up this idea in a way that will reach others.

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2. This journal publishes research focused on medieval and renaissance English drama. You can read all the contents for free one year after they are published, if you're interested.

3. I say this is how it "generally works" because journals and publications in varied academic disciplines follow slightly different practices. The system for reviewing scholarly work developed over time and then was adapted. For detailed discussions of this history, read the article by Burnham and then maybe follow up with the book by Shatz.

Professor Good-Idea could share their work by walking down the hall to talk to a group of students. They could post about it on Instagram. They could send a press release to a newspaper or magazine. While those strategies would spread the idea, they wouldn't necessarily reach other experts. What's more, these ways of making an idea public wouldn't help Professor Good-Idea evaluate whether the finding actually is new or important or even accurate. So that's why Professor Good-Idea starts working on a peer-reviewed publication.

Let's say this scholar writes the best version of a journal article they can produce to present their finding. (At different stages of drafting and writing and revising, they likely ask others for advice and feedback. They might even get some help with proofreading and formatting.) When they think the piece is as good as it can be, they submit it to the academic journal in which they hope it will be published. At this point, the journal's editors – people responsible for the publication – make some decisions. If they think the piece is not appropriate for the journal, they will send it back; this is called a desk rejection. More likely, though, if Professor Good-Idea has done quality research and produced a pretty strong piece of writing, the article goes out for peer review.

Peer review in this situation means the editors identify some people who are respected experts in the same field as Professor Good-Idea and who have knowledge of the subject matter. They send Professor Good-Idea's article to those individuals – thought to be the peers of our imaginary professor – and ask them to provide written feedback. Usually that means the editors ask each reviewer for a written response that explains whether the key idea is original, makes a meaningful contribution to the field, and is well-supported. They will also invite comments on how the piece of writing could be improved – what terms to define, what other sources to reference, and what errors to correct. And, they will ask for an overall recommendation: Should this piece be published by the journal or not? Is it possible that it could be published after some changes are made? The editors rely on these recommendations from peer reviewers to determine next steps.

Sometimes, after a round of very positive peer review, a writer gets news from the editors that a piece is being accepted for publication with no or only minor changes. That's great news – and it happens rarely. It's also possible that editors will write to the researcher saying that the piece won't be accepted for publication – and while that sort of rejection can be hard to take, the writer will still receive peer review comments that could help with further revision and rethinking before the author sends it to another jour-

nal for consideration. More often, though, an author will receive what's called a "revise-and-resubmit" request – that is, a response from editors saying that they would like to see a revised version of the submission that takes into account the feedback from peer reviewers. A revised submission might go through another round of peer review (or even rejection and then peer review at another journal) before eventually being published.

Let's imagine a happy ending for Professor Good-Idea; after a "revise-and-resubmit" decision from the editors, the writer spends time responding to peer-review feedback and reworks the article. Professor Good-Idea sends the revised piece back to the journal, the editors accept it, and the article gets published.

If it sounds like this peer review-process takes a lot of time and energy, it does. Time between first submission and eventual publication ranges from a few weeks to a few years. And this system is not without flaws. Great articles (and book chapters and even whole books) sometimes go through multiple rounds of rejection and revision and resubmission before they eventually get published.[4] Peer reviewers are people, so they aren't always perfect. Both editors and peer reviewers can be short-sighted, or mistaken, or simply hostile to ideas that challenge their assumptions.

But, at its best, the peer-review system helps to ensure the research that gets published is as good as it can be. A peer-reviewed article is a piece that several independent experts have checked to make sure that its research and the way it's written are accurate, reasonable, and responsible. That's why academic researchers – and your instructors giving you instructions for conducting your own library research – tend to assume peer-reviewed publications are reliable.

Bad Review by Reviewer Two

Even if peer review is generally good for the quality of research published, it can get ugly for individual writers. One way that editors strive to ensure honest, fair feedback is to keep the identities of authors and reviewers anonymous.[5] If you've ever read the comments in an online forum like Reddit or Twitter, you know how rude people can be when they don't have

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4. See MacDonald for some examples of scientific papers that, after being rejected by one or more journals, went on to win a Nobel Prize. You can find scads of other examples with a simple internet search.

5. Historically, this has been called "blind" review. In an effort to avoid ableist language, the journal I help edit calls it "anonymous" peer review.

to face the person they're attacking – and some reviewers, shielded by anonymity, put vicious comments in their peer review reports.

Note that this sort of viciousness can take different forms. A mean reviewer might reject a submission while failing to give sustained attention to the basic point of the article. An unreasonable reviewer might suggest a piece could be published only after a series of changes that would require lots of impossible, new research. A cruel reviewer might launch personal comments against the author, saying the person who wrote the piece is badly educated, silly, or sloppy.

Editors and academic writers tend to call the person who writes such hurtful reviews "Reviewer Two" because the anonymized peer reviewers' reports sent to an author will often be labeled "One" and "Two." Since most peer-reviewed publications seek two outside reviewers, and since editors tend to present the more positive (and reasonable) review first when sending feedback to an author, the nasty reviewer has the nickname Reviewer Two.

The widespread impact of Reviewer Two types of comments on professional academic writers seems clear based on how many social media accounts there are joking about such feedback. On Twitter alone, you'll find accounts with names like Reviewer2, ShitMyReviewersSay, and WorseReviewer. You can buy coffee mugs that read "Screw You, Reviewer Two" and "I Survived Reviewer Two."

Less amusing are the stories I received when I asked for examples of Reviewer Two types of feedback. A colleague of mine who publishes widely on academic writing revealed that a reviewer said of the manuscript for her (now published) book, "I don't think the author can write." Lots of people shared horror stories when I requested on Twitter that published authors post the Reviewer Two comment that haunts them. But most memorable to me are the people who reached out privately using email or direct messaging because they said the experience of getting a Reviewer Two comment is hard for them to talk about in a public forum.

If scholars who have published multiple peer-reviewed journal articles and received international recognition for their research projects feel shaky after getting harsh, ungenerous, or unfair criticism, then a student starting out as an academic writer is even more likely to be injured when Reviewer Two strikes. At best, tales of the meanest comment you ever got on your writing is fodder for darkly humorous conversations with friends. At worst, attacks on your ideas and expression can give you the sense you don't have anything worth saying or know how to say it. Reviewer Two-style comments – in a classroom setting, from an instructor, or from a publisher –

can wind up silencing the voices of individuals whose ideas have the power to change minds or transform an entire academic field.

The academic peer-review process – peopled with editors and the dreaded Reviewer Two – might seem pretty far away from the peer-review work you do when reading a classmate's draft. Admittedly, the feedback you offer isn't linked to a decision about whether a piece of work will get published or signify that an essay has qualities that mean it shouldn't be taken seriously by experts in a scholarly field. (In fact, you might not know much about the topic on which your classmate is writing!)

But there are some key similarities. When you read your peer's work in progress, you stand in for a larger audience that the author hopes to reach. At best, in an apprentice version of professional academic peer review, you take your classmate's work seriously and think about how it might be improved. And, at worst, if you're not careful, there's the potential for you to offer feedback that isn't helpful – or might even be damaging.

How To Be a Good Peer Reviewer

How can you give honest and even critical feedback – not just empty "I really liked it" kinds of comments – and still avoid being Reviewer Two?

First, be aware that it's easy to edge up to Reviewer Two types of feedback if you're not thoughtful about your response. Problems in a piece of writing can seem obvious after a single, cursory reading, and if that's what we focus on, we can wind up offering nothing but criticism. If you only point out flaws without noting anything that's working, however, you make it difficult for a writer to see what they could develop (instead of just starting over). It's good practice to offer at least one major piece of constructive praise before presenting any criticism. (For advice about writing effective praise with lots of great examples, see DePeter's chapter in *Writing Spaces,* Volume 3.) If you find it challenging to identify and describe the strongest aspect of an essay and explain why it's working, that means you're doing a good job – it takes effort to produce helpful peer reviews, and the more you practice, the better you will get at providing this type of feedback.

Second, remember that when you point out weaknesses that might be addressed or problems that could be fixed in a piece of writing, you are doing so as a peer, not a judge or jury or divine authority. In my experience, the best reviewers of a submitted research article to the journal I help edit see themselves as collaborators in a larger project, one of many voices in an ongoing conversation about a particular topic or question. (For a clas-

sic discussion of academic discourse as a conversation, see Booth.) Try to think of yourself as a reader who wants to understand what the writer is trying to communicate to you, and suggest ways they could do it more effectively. Offer specific recommendations of what they might try alongside any criticisms. Cheer on all the ways in which the essay you are reading is working well, and stress how it could be even better.

To help you offer feedback that meets these ideals, I suggest that after reading your classmate's work once, you start by writing answers to the following questions; that is, don't write anything on the draft itself for now:

1. **Originality:** What is the key point that this author is trying to make? What is the central thesis? What is the purpose of this piece? Does this seem like a promising project to you? Why or why not? [Note: If you can't figure out the key point, thesis or purpose, let the author know what you think it is and why you are unsure.]

2. **Argumentation (development):** How does the author develop this argument? Does it seem like there's enough evidence to support the claims being made? Are there points that seem to you to need more support or explanation? [Note: If you are unconvinced by some points that are being presented – or think others will be unconvinced – explain why.]

3. **Argumentation (arrangement):** As you read through this piece from beginning to end, did the order in which points and information appeared seem sensible? Are there places where you felt lost or confused? Can you suggest a way to arrange material that might be more effective? [Note: Imagine an outline for the current version of the essay – does that outline seem logical or effective to you? What changes might you make?]

4. **Readability:** Does the style seem to suit the intended audience of this piece given its key goals? At the sentence level, is it easy to understand? At the word choice level, is the vocabulary appropriate for the subject matter and purpose of the essay? Are there small errors (formatting, etc.) that take attention away from the author's ideas? [Note: This item is not an invitation to proofread or copy-edit. Try to focus only on places where you think a "mistake" has a negative impact on the larger purpose of the essay.]

5. **Overall:** Are there specific examples of strengths or problems you want to call to the attention of the author? Can you offer sugges-

tions for what exactly the author might try to make this piece more effective? [Note: This is a place where you can comment on anything that didn't get covered in the other four items on this list as well as make points that seem related to more than one element.]

These questions are designed to elicit peer review that encounters another writer's work on its own terms and offers constructive feedback; they're not a checklist but rather a guide to engaging with someone else's writing in a holistic way. As you write your answers in a separate document, you should find you tend to stay at a high level of praise and of criticism without getting bogged down in minor details.

And I'm not just saying what you are doing when you comment on a classmate's work is – or should be – a version of professional academic peer review; the list of questions above is a condensed version of the instructions *Early Theatre* sends out to our journal peer reviewers. This set of concerns can apply to almost any piece of academic writing you need to evaluate – including your own. And yet, peer review is especially valuable because even the most skilled writers are challenged by revising their own work. Being a peer reviewer and sharing what you have written as responses to the questions above – by synthesizing your answers in the form of a letter to the author, or even by summarizing orally – helps the author make a plan for how best to revise.

When you serve as a peer reviewer, do unto other writers as you would have them do unto you. You would be hurt by Reviewer Two types of feedback, so don't throw those sorts of comments at your classmate's writing. In a writing class, we want to replicate the good part of peer review – the elements that improve a piece of writing – and avoid the bad part.

Good Uses of Peer Review (and What To Do with Reviewer Two)

All of this might lead you to question: Why do editors send out Reviewer Two peer review reports to authors? If a review is in no way beneficial, we sometimes don't, or we might extract from a set of written comments only the sentences that seem likely to help the author. Sometimes, though, we believe a writer can learn something important from the type of feedback offered by Reviewer Two.

It's perfectly reasonable to be upset or frustrated or sad after getting negative feedback about your work in progress. A mean Reviewer Two-style comment might make you – quite reasonably – angry or hurt. These

emotions are real, but you get to choose what to do with them. A critical comment can lead you to walk away from a project (or even jump to the conclusion "I'm a terrible writer"), or it can fuel some great rethinking and revising work. The most skilled writers are often people who have figured out what they can learn from the sort of feedback that initially makes them feel terrible.

There's lots of good advice about how to use the feedback you get. (I particularly recommend Grauman's chapter "What's that Supposed to Mean?" in *Writing Spaces,* Vol. 4.) But general discussions of revision won't necessarily get you past the challenge of what feels like a Reviewer Two-style smackdown. When a comment knocks you back, you need to face it with a growth mindset – to see yourself both as someone who believes you can learn to revise your writing and as someone with the ability to think critically about what has come your way. (See Wells's chapter in this volume for a great introduction to "Dispositions Toward Learning"). And you need a plan.

I recommend you practice responding to Reviewer Two-style comments by first freewriting an unfiltered initial response and then, in a separate step, thinking about how to revise. Just as peer review with your classmates lets you work through an apprentice version of the process used by professional academic writers, it also allows you to experiment with managing feedback that might be incomplete or unclear. Thinking about what you as a writer can take away from comments that are mostly unhelpful or even upsetting can help you revise effectively. I offer you one example here, and you will find more at the end of this essay (see Appendix 1).

Example: I don't understand why anyone would want to write about this boring play.

> My initial response: I hate this reviewer. This is so unfair. Aren't literary scholars supposed to be interested in a wide range of texts? How do I get someone to care about something they think is boring? Maybe I should give up on this topic?

> Planned response: Whether or not this play is "boring" is beside the point – I can make more explicit in my argument that this play hasn't received enough attention from scholars, especially since it connects to a subject that has been discussed a lot lately. Adding a few sentences to my introduction will more clearly establish

the larger implications of this topic and why it's worth reading my argument.

Note that this is an actual example taken from a peer-review report I received – and the "planned response" offers you a sense of how I used this comment to guide revision (and ultimately to get an article published in a highly respected academic journal).

You can also try turning the feedback you get from different readers – say multiple peers in class, a Writing Center tutor, and your instructor – into a formal plan for revision. This is an especially useful process if you have received what seems like contradictory advice – for instance, if your classmate says you are offering too much detail, but a Writing Center tutor suggests your key points need to be supported with more detailed evidence.[6]

In Appendix 2 you'll find a blank chart that offers a system for reflecting on the advice you've received about your work in progress. You can make a version of this chart for yourself to turn feedback from peer reviewers into a to-do (and sometimes also a not-to-do) list. The chart below is a sample version I've filled in with some comments given in response to a research essay that tries to get more people to register to vote.

Features evaluated	Commentary offered	Reflection (Valid or not?)	Planned response
Originality	"I can't tell whether your goal is mostly to motivate people to vote or to vote for a particular candidate. These points seem to get muddled together."	Valid. My goal is to motivate all people who can vote to vote, so I need to look for and rework places that seem to imply I only want people who support the same candidates I do to vote.	Revise my thesis to make my key point more explicit. Highlight sections in my draft that mention a particular candidate currently running, and make sure I'm not implying any favoritism.

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6. Studies of peer review in academic publishing demonstrate that multiple peer reviewers don't consistently offer the same feedback on a piece of writing; see Fiske. Even if they agree about the general recommendation (say, revise-and-resubmit), they sometimes comment on different elements or offer divergent recommendations. That doesn't mean peer review is a bad process – just that peer reviewers are human.

Features evaluated	Commentary offered	Reflection (Valid or not?)	Planned response
Argumentation (arrangement)	"There are so many examples from past elections, and I'm getting lost. Maybe cut some of these examples?"	<u>Not valid</u>. I think the examples are the strongest part of this essay, so I'm not going to cut any – but maybe I could better explain what each one signifies.	Check and, if it seems necessary, clarify explanations about the significance of every example I include.
Readability	"The writer uses the term 'opponent' all over this essay to refer to the candidate who isn't the incumbent – I think this will offend anyone who doesn't want to vote for the person already in office."	<u>Valid</u>. Interesting comment. I hadn't noticed the implications of this word, and given that I want potential voters to see elections as something other than hostile and angry, I probably need to get rid of this kind of language.	Highlight in yellow any word choices that seem to suggest antagonism or hostility. Then rework that phrasing.

You might also add to your own chart a column that lets you order your planned response tasks. Maybe you want to tackle the easy tasks first (e.g. correcting the spelling of a particular term) and hold off on big jobs (e.g. reordering your examples in the second half of the essay). Maybe you want to manage more global, structural revisions before bothering with small details. In any case, you're likely to find that planning revision as a set of steps makes this stage of the writing process more manageable and effective.

The key way we learn to improve our writing is to think about what we're doing. Getting feedback from readers and then evaluating that feedback offers valuable practice in thinking about thinking. (Giles's essay "Reflective Writing and the Revision Process" offers a helpful overview of "thinking about thinking," also known as metacognition.) By working through a reflective process, we can come to understand that not every nasty comment from a peer reviewer needs to be taken at face value. (For

example, we don't necessarily need to change our topic if a reader sniffs, "This is confusing," although we might decide to explain our main point more systematically.) And maybe we can even come to recognize that our own tendency to think harshly about our work in progress could be a step towards identifying a section we might revise later.

Conclusion

The popular fiction author Neil Gaiman offers the following advice about writing: "Remember: When people tell you something's wrong or doesn't work for them, they are almost always right. When they tell you exactly what they think is wrong and how to fix it, they are almost always wrong." It's the job of a peer reviewer to identify what's wrong and to suggest how to fix it, so this quote might not seem to apply to peer-reviewed academic writing. But Gaiman's statement is a helpful reminder that writers need to think critically about suggestions for revision and ponder what changes might improve a project. You can get feedback from a variety of readers, but the choice of what do with their comments and the work you submit is your own.

When you serve as a peer reviewer for another writer's work, you can help them improve it by being honest about exactly what you think is effective. You can even say what you think could be stronger and suggest changes. But if you insist that your perspective is the only one that matters and that a writer who doesn't listen to you is hopeless, you are acting like Reviewer Two. Your own peer review feedback will be good (rather than bad or ugly) if you offer it with the expectation that the writer will make their own decisions regarding how to act on your advice.

You get to do the same with comments you receive – even (maybe especially?) if they come from a Reviewer Two who thinks you should give up. Use criticism to create a plan for revising. Responding to negative feedback is one of the most challenging aspects of the academic writing process even for much-published writers – but thoughtful, effective revision is within your control. Peer review is both something you can get better at and a process that you can rely on to get you to the point where you say with confidence that something you have written is good.

APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE REVIEWER TWO
COMMENTS FOR ANALYSIS AND RESPONSE

1. The first three sentences of this paper are in passive voice, and passive voice isn't good writing. I stopped reading once I realized these sorts of grammar and style problems are all over the essay.
    Initial response:
    Planned response:

2. All the evidence you include in your draft is based on official government data and statistics from medical journal articles about cancer survival rates after surgery. There isn't any sense of what actual people think and feel about having cancer. Why not go out and do interviews with cancer patients?
    Initial response:
    Planned response:

3. I hate math, so no matter how much evidence you offer, I'm never going to think an essay proposing a summer math camp for high school students is a good idea. Why do you want to torture people by making them learn math?
    Initial response:
    Planned response:

4. I find the whole middle section of this draft confusing. You need to cut that section and change your topic.
    Initial response:
    Planned response:

5. [Create your own Reviewer Two style comment here.]

Appendix 2: Steps for Responding to Reviewers' Feedback

The blank chart below offers you a system for reflecting on advice you've received about work in progress and can help guide a revision. This system is inspired by a chart presented by Wendy Laura Belcher in her book *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks.* Belcher offers advice to academic writers about how to respond to reader reports when they have been told to revise and resubmit their work so that it can be considered for publication. Her guidance is, I think, appropriate for any writer responding to feedback.

As you make your own chart, pay special attention to the "Reflection" column, keeping in mind that you can reasonably decide that a comment is not a valid piece of criticism. It is possible for a peer reviewer to be wrong. But even a bad comment can help you make your writing more effective if it gets you to think about what the reviewer focused on and then consider possible revision options.

Revision Plan Chart

Features evaluated	Peer-reviewer comment	Reflection (Valid or not?)	Planned response
Originality			
Argumentation (arrangement)			
Engagement with relevant research (examples)			
Readability			
Other			

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Teacher Resources for "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Peer Review"

Overview and Teaching Strategies

Instructors could assign this essay in a first-year or upper-level writing course as students are learning to offer each other peer feedback. Questions, models, and charts in the chapter and appendices can support peer review assignments and revision exercises in or outside of class. However, it might be even more useful to have students work through this material after they have already experienced one round of peer review with classmates and received written feedback from the instructor since it offers strategies for transforming comments on a piece of writing into plans for revision – and provides advice about processing the emotions that come up whenever someone criticizes our writing.

Discussion Questions

1. This chapter offers some examples of Reviewer Two comments, and we can find even nastier ones in the Twitter accounts that are referenced. What is the harshest comment you ever got about your writing? How did you feel about that comment when you first got it, and how do you feel about it now? Do you think the comment presented any valid criticism, or was it just wrong, or mean, or misguided? Imagine exactly how you would respond to that comment if it showed up on something you are currently writing.

2. Writing is an activity that generates a lot of emotions. Why do you think this is? What words come up for you when you describe how you feel when you get a writing assignment or sit down to write? How do you think these emotions affect your writing work? Is there anything about this relationship to your writing that you would like to change? If you would describe yourself as someone who hates writing, what would it take for you to feel good (or even neutral) about your writing?

3. Kelly notes that "even the most skilled writers are challenged by revising their own work." Peer review can help with revision because

it's not just a way of getting someone else's perspective on a piece of your writing; reflecting on peer review comments is a chance to experiment with that different perspective yourself as part of the process of planning a revision. Think about times you have revised your own work and the strategies you used when deciding what changes to make. Whether or not peer review was involved, what ways did you find to get different perspectives on and distance from your work-in-progress while revising?

ACTIVITIES

Students in higher education classrooms often lack the understanding that the instructors teaching their courses are accomplished researchers – possibly graduate students working on MA or PhD thesis projects; possibly authors of published articles, chapters, or books; and always teachers whose work engages with the scholarship of teaching and learning. While we aren't trying to make all students into academics, much less clones of ourselves, we do them no favors by failing to share our own stories of academic research and writing. By focusing on peer review – and particularly on the label we give to peer-review-gone-wrong, Reviewer Two – this chapter ensures that students see academic writing as produced through collaboration (by writers, reviewers, and editors) and involving revision. Instructors can make clear the importance of drafting, revision, and workshopping by linking such classroom "assignments" or "scaffolding activities" to real experiences of professional academic writing – ideally their own.

- In a class session, walk students through an example of your writing at various stages of development; doing so makes clear not only that you are an academic writer but also that you are not a divine creature who produces brilliant one-and-done drafts. I find it helpful to show my students how an idea developed from a conference paper proposal into a conference paper, then a first draft of a book chapter or article, then a revision of that piece, then another revision, etc. I explain what feedback – from audience members at a conference presentation, colleagues I asked to read work in progress, peer reviewers, editors, etc. – I took into account at each stage of revision. You might share a seminar paper, thesis chapter, or any other piece of writing that has gone through multiple revisions guided by feedback from several readers.

- If you have peer review/reader reports for a piece of writing you published, share these documents, and talk students through how you responded to the feedback you received. Make explicit that by the time a piece of scholarship shows up as a published article or book chapter a student can read and cite, it has been checked, reworked, and revised many times.
- Give students a piece of writing that you consider to be a very rough first draft (maybe two or three typed pages that you pounded out in half an hour without revising, editing, or even proofreading), and ask them to give you feedback on it. If you like, start by asking them to offer mean, nitpicky Reviewer Two types of criticism, and model how you would handle those sorts of comments as well as what ideas for revision you might glean from this feedback.