

Adding Friction. How Do I Peer Review My Partner's Source List?

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A student asks, "My teacher assigned us to peer review each other's sources—but I've never done this before. I don't want to offend my friend or make him feel bad. What do I *actually* do? What do I say?"

What Is Peer Reviewing?

The goals of peer review and self-evaluation are similar: to improve. Studies show that you learn as much from giving feedback as getting it. Think about the last time you had a problem and discussed it with a friend. You felt satisfied and happy when your friend listened with empathy, asked good questions, and helped you figure something out. In the process, your friend probably thought about their own experiences. You both benefitted.

Peer reviewing's a lot like that. It's honest and helpful. Rather than being critical or belittling your friend, you'll notice their effort and good work—and saying something good at the beginning can help your partner hear what's not working so well later. However, your positive comments have to feel genuine. You can tell when someone's fakey-nice.

Begin by Noticing Specifically What's Working Well

When you assume that your partner is working to the best of their abilities at any particular time, you can understand why general praise often feels empty. Your first comment(s) should be specific, positive and, include evidence to support what you say. Here are three clear comments that explain why you respect your peer's efforts:

- Looks like you found a couple of good sources *against* your position. I think it's hard to be fair to the other side of an issue.
- You've used some research studies—I bet they were challenging to read!
- Current information is really needed for your topic—and all these sources are from 2015-2016.

Don't Get Picky – Focus on the Big Picture

Expert researchers show what they know about a topic by identifying the field's major thinkers in their reference list. Here are some questions you can use to help your peer think about their source list:

1. Do the sources match the topic? If you find a source that doesn't seem related to the topic, ask how it fits.

Try this: Your partner is working on women's rights in Ancient Rome. What would you want to ask about these MLA references?

- Kamm, Antony. "Dress." *The Romans*, June 2009, www.the-romans.co.uk/dress.htm.
- Kamm, Antony. "The Role of Women." *The Romans*, www.the-romans.co.uk/women.htm.

2. Do the sources fit the audience? If your peer's project is to write a research brief on global warming for the president, would he or she respect the opinions and ideas of these sources? Are they reputable authorities in the president's eyes? If your partner is developing an infographic to explain to parents why they should bring their kids in to be vaccinated for measles, would they "buy-in" to these medical sources? Would parents trust these authorities?

Try this: Your partner is compiling a fact sheet to help pediatricians answer objections parents might raise about vaccinating a child against measles. What would you ask about these APA references?

- Addressing vaccine hesitancy. (2015, August 18). Retrieved from World Health Organization website: http://www.who.int/immunization/programmes_systems/vaccine_hesitancy/en/
- California state vaccine requirements. (2016, May 23). Retrieved from National Vaccine Information Center website: <http://www.nvic.org/Vaccine-Laws/state-vaccine-requirements/california.aspx>

3. Do the sources match the purpose? If your peer is writing a persuasive essay on gun control, you'd expect to see various sides represented. If your partner is investigating the history of the voting rights act, you'd assume that they'd include primary sources written by people at the time.

Try this: Your partner is working on women's rights today. What would you want to ask about these MLA references?

- "Report of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Seneca Falls, New York, July 19th and 20th, 1848. Proceedings and Declaration of Sentiments." *Library of Congress*, [memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/rbcmillerbib:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(rbcmiller001106\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/rbcmillerbib:@field(DOCID+@lit(rbcmiller001106))).

- United States, Commission on Civil Rights. *The Voting Rights Act: The First Months*. By John A. Hannah et al., Government Printing Office, Nov. 1966, www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr12V942.pdf.

4. What might be missing? In the messy middle of a research project, your peer might not notice “black holes” in their source list—but you probably have enough distance from the nitty-gritty to notice omissions.

Try this: You are looking over your partner’s MLA works cited for an essay on how to afford college. What suggestions might you make about what to add?

Works Cited

Campos, Paul F. "The Real Reason College Costs so Much." *The New York Times*, 4 Apr. 2015, nyti.ms/1yLPSKv. Editorial.

"College Costs Are out of Control." *CNBC*, 13 July 2016, www.cnn.com/2016/07/12/college-costs-are-out-of-control.html.

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Rauchway, Eric. "Paul Campos Probably Does Not Know the Real Reason for Tuition Increases." *Crooked Timber*, 6 Apr. 2015, crookedtimber.org/2015/04/06/paul-campos-probably-does-not-know-the-real-reason-for-tuition-increases/.

"Rising Costs Brings New Focus on How Colleges Set Their Prices." *U.S. News & World Report*, 1 Feb. 2016, www.usnews.com/news/college-of-tomorrow/articles/2016-02-01/rising-costs-brings-new-focus-on-how-colleges-set-their-prices.

Get Practical – Explain How You Found It (or Not)

Precise documentation enables “a curious reader, viewer, or other user to track down your sources” and evaluate “whose work influenced yours” (*MLA Handbook* 126).

Writers owe their readers precise pointers to the sources they use. However, sometimes a source isn’t refindable because it has been moved or taken down. At other times, key information is omitted or incorrectly documented.

Try this: Here are four Chicago-style references. Imagine that you are viewing an infographic and decide to learn more about the topic. If you have trouble locating these sources, explain why in a way that helps your partner figure out what’s missing or incorrect so that the reference can be fixed.*

Bibliography

"Apple: Many 'Genuine' Apple Products on Amazon Are Fake." Bloomberg.
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-202/apple-many-genuine-apple-products-on-amazon-are-fake>.

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<https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=israeli+palestinian+conflict>.

Lund, Nelson, and Adam Winkler. "Amendment II." National Constitution Center. Last modified 1789.
<http://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendments/amendment-ii>.

(*If you use NoodleTools, you can download this reference list <http://noodle.to/unfindable> and make comments on each source in your own account.)

Read It to Me

You and your partner can brainstorm strategies for giving each other feedback. "Reading back" sources to each other can get pretty funny. In the bibliography above, did you notice that Lund and Winkler wrote the Second Amendment...and it was modified in 1789?

Feeling Better about Peer Reviewing?

Here's a short self- assessment of what you can do or still need to learn. Pick a level for each of the three comments on the left – and give an example of why or when in the corresponding box.

Self-assessment:	I can do this now	I'm practicing—it still feels hard	I can't do this well enough yet—I might like help.
1. I can give honest, positive, personalized feedback.			
2. I can ask neutral questions that include clear feedback about what could improve.			
3. I can explain specifically why I can't find a source so that my partner understands what needs to be revised and can fix it.			



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