

6 Tips for Peer Editing Written Work

by [James Broadbridge](#)

Audience/level: University students, all proficiency levels

Peer editing of written work can be a trial for both teachers and students. Students are often reluctant to state that another student's work is incorrect; lack the confidence to criticize another student's writing; and also lack the motivation to improve a fellow student's work when it has no visible benefit to their own grade. These six tips will help ease the problems involved in this tricky step in the writing process.

1. Work in Groups

Place students in small groups of two or three with only one essay to discuss and work on. The power of the group can lead to an increase in confidence, and therefore higher quality correction and feedback.

2. Set Time Limits

Students always work more efficiently with a time limit. Fifteen minutes is more than enough time for a small group to work on any one piece of writing. Student editors will also benefit from reading a variety of students' work instead of just reading one essay for a longer period.

3. Restrict the Number of Errors to Be Found

The task of reading a whole essay can be rather daunting. By restricting the number of errors (to five, for example), groups or individuals will feel confident enough to find those errors.

4. Search for Specific Errors

Weaker or demotivated students can often struggle to find even one or two errors in a piece of writing. However, by first highlighting a typical error, for example subject-verb agreement, and asking students to check for similar errors, such students can feel that the task is manageable with little effort or stress.

5. Apply Pressure

Make it clear to the students that a good friend will find as many errors as they can, but a bad friend will find none. The more instances they find of writing that they feel is awkward or incorrect will help their friend to obtain a higher grade. By writing nothing they are helping no one.

6. Allow L1 Use

I am a great believer in restricting the use of L1 in all my classrooms, but there is a place for it here. Students need to be able to leave clear notes for the writer, and it will really help them to pass on important information if they can do so in their L1. The writer must be able to understand the advice and help given by the editor, and if this is given in the L2 there can be misunderstandings. (This assumes, of course, that the writer and the editor share a common L1.)

Peer editing is a vital element of writing classes, and by using the techniques mentioned above, students grow to become better writers, and the methods help to create a collaborative atmosphere in the classroom. The use of these tips also has the benefit of allowing students to gain valuable reinforcement from their peers of key writing techniques from previous classes, as students help themselves by helping others. Furthermore, they give the teacher an opportunity to quickly assess which students are particularly proficient at editing, and therefore spend more time with those who are not. This gives those students the benefit of extra help and the chance to gain in confidence while they help others.

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