

Basics

Peer review is when students read each other's work to edit and make comments on it. This can be done in pairs or groups, and it has the great advantage that it is usually easier to spot someone else's mistakes than your own. This is because you are removed from the work, so you have a more objective eye. You look at self-editing in *C21 English for the 21st Century*, Level 4 (see also **Edit (1) – self-editing**). Here, many of the same techniques will apply, but you will be looking at the work of others.

The academic context

At university or college, it is very beneficial to your work and learning if you can set up peer review groups. If you want to publish your writing, for example a report, you will probably need to get it peer-reviewed first. Informally, it is always a good idea to ask someone else to look at your work, and you might be asked to look at theirs. This is a great opportunity to make improvements *before* the work is assessed.

Key features

- It is advisable to self-edit first and then give your peer a clean copy of your work which they can read to find the mistakes you may have missed.
- If you don't (both) know any special proofreading symbols, it is a good idea to highlight/underline and number the mistakes or problems you find (1, 2, 3 ...). Then you can write numbered comments on a separate page, keeping the original as clean as possible.
- As in self-editing, you need to check for the basics, like spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes.
- You should make specific suggestions about what you feel needs changing. For example, point out problems with how the work is organized, choice of words, the style/register, the use of details, the construction of sentences (e.g. are they too short?) and whether the topic has been addressed fully.
- Your job as a peer reviewer is to identify where you think changes need to be made and make suggestions. It is *not* your job to rewrite anything.
- You should be positive and constructive. Always find something good to say about the work. It is important to encourage your peers. If something is wrong, offer suggestions, not just criticism.

Challenges / difficulties

Peer reviewing takes time, and when you are studying it may be difficult to find that time. You also need to be careful how you phrase your criticism of someone's work. They will probably have worked hard on it, so consider their feelings as you prepare your comments. They may know the subject better than you do, so you need to be prepared for some of your comments to be ignored.

How can I develop this skill?

As with most skills, the more you practise the better you get. Offer to review a friend's work (it doesn't matter if they are not free to review yours – someone else might offer to do it). If you have reviewed someone's work, follow up by checking what the tutor/lecturer/examiner had to say about it. Did you find the most important mistakes?

Learning outcome

Looking at other people's good and bad points will help you think about (and improve) your own writing. If you are both studying the same subject, discussion of each other's work will also help you to know your subject better.

Theory to practice

 Imagine a friend has asked you to review some writing and you have highlighted and numbered the mistakes or problems you want to comment on. Make your corrections or comments and discuss them with a partner.

It **cannot doubted**¹ that air travel is one of the safest ways to **go on a journey or go on your holidays**.² Although people may have a fear of flying **due of**³ the fact that they are in the air and therefore not in control of the situation, statistically speaking, there are very few fatalities from this **way of travel**.⁴ **On the contrary**,⁵ in many countries the number of people killed on the roads is very high. **One**⁶ phenomenon that instils fear in many passengers but in fact poses very little threat is that of a direct lightning strike **during**⁷ the plane is in the air. On average, each jet airliner is struck by lightning **about**⁸ once a year, so it is a reasonably common occurrence. Nevertheless, although the effect can be dramatic, with blinding flashes, shuddering and temporary power failure, it very rarely causes an accident. This is thanks, in part, to **the metal that encases the aircraft, that allows**⁹ the electrical charge to surround the plane without entering it. The charge then continues **it's**¹⁰ journey to earth.

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Ways to get more practice

Swap some of your past work with another student, and see if you can each make some suggestions for improvement. Remember to offer to review each other's work in future and, where possible, follow up by asking to see the tutor's/lecturer's/examiner's comments after it has been assessed.