

Adopting A Basic Student Peer Review Process in EAP A/B Writing

Malcolm A. McLucas
Chubu University

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Introduction

THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS INVOLVES COLLABORATIVE LEARNING where first year students assess their study partner's work and provide feedback. The process is formative. It has the aim of improving student learning 'as it happens' while simultaneously improving the quality of the final work to be submitted for teacher assessment. In a student-centered learning environment, students constantly give and receive feedback. They do this by considering and evaluating the quality, value or success of each other's work.

The overall goal of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) Writing A/B at Chubu University is to write a fully realized paragraph that contains a topic sentence and relevant supporting sentences. Peer review is one feature used in this class to facilitate success in achieving this goal. It can also be one of the most challenging for first year students in an EAP writing class.

Peer review should become a regular, expected and natural part of the writing process for students and be a comfortable, less intimidating experience for the writer and the reviewer.

It is therefore important that elements of the process are introduced right from the start of the school year and right at the beginning of each lesson, throughout the lesson, continuing and developing on a recurring weekly basis.

Benefits

There are a number of benefits from adopting regular student peer review. Peer review allows students to have a meaningful interaction with their peers. A student's

work can be improved when they reflect on and incorporate some of the ideas and suggestions made by their peers. In addition, students are exposed to ideas they may not have even thought of. Conversely, the opportunity to see someone else's work is one that students may rarely get, allowing them to reflect upon their own work in new and different ways. Students also develop the skill of providing constructive feedback to others.

Feedback, whether it's from a teacher or a study partner, is an essential component of the learning process. Effective feedback can motivate students, change their study practices, and improve their learning. Engaging in peer review and receiving feedback from a peer exposes them to a greater diversity of perspectives than just those of their teacher.

Another benefit of introducing peer review is the ability to receive feedback from a number of different people. Students have multiple study partners across the academic year to discuss their work with and in turn get an opportunity to critique. Since students often care about what their peers think, feedback that has a social dimension is valuable.

The peer review process can enhance student learning by identifying areas needing improvement and providing constructive suggestions. It can improve problem solving skills, encourage reflection, promote skills in self-assessment and in turn improve self confidence. The process can also increase student motivation by fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership for their study partners learning.

Classroom Activities

Warm Up

The process of peer review begins as soon as class does. Students are given a short exercise that promotes concentration, cooperation and communication. Each week one of five recurring exercises starts off the class. These tasks are rotated across the academic year helping students get used to reviewing a partners work. The following five exercises were adapted and reworked for an EAP class from similar ones contained in the resource handbook 'Five Minute Activities' from Cambridge University Press.

- **Correcting Mistakes.** Six sentences are written on the board. Each with two grammatical errors built into the sentence. The sentences themselves usually

relate to the grammar being studied in the textbook. As always, every opportunity is exploited to recycle.

Students work by themselves to correct the errors then swap their results with their study partner. This offers the opportunity to discuss and correct any missed errors. Corrections are then marked up on the board. This exercise is useful in preparing students for the formal Peer Review Worksheet (discussed below).

- **Spelling Accuracy.** Students are given twelve spoken words to spell. The words are recycled vocabulary from the themes being studied. Students hear the words and must write them down being careful to accurately spell them. Students then swap their papers with their partner and correct any mistakes they can recognize. Finally, they feedback to their partner highlighting any mistakes. Twelve students then come to the board and write up the answers.
- **Opposites.** Students are given twelve spoken words. They only need to write the opposite of each word. E.g. Black > White. Students then swap and compare their answers, discuss answers and make corrections with their study partner. Twelve students then come to the board and write up the answers.
- **American Homophones.** Same sound, different spelling, different meaning. E.g. Eight/Ate. Students are given twelve spoken words. After writing down at least twenty-four words students swap, compare, and correct errors. Twelve students then come to the board and write up the answers.
- **Opposites/Homophones hybrid.** Students are given six of each in no particular order. Students must decide which is which and write down the two words for each example, following the review process as described above.

While these exercises aren't strictly peer review per se, they start the process by encouraging students to become comfortable assessing their study partner's work. They are exercises that offer an access point to what follows.

Adapting the Speed Write

An important component of EAP Writing is the ten-minute speed write. In this exercise students write as much as they can, as fast as they can, and on a given topic with the object being a high word count that increases with practice. This exercise also offers an opportunity for students to cooperate and feedback on their study partner's output.

Students are given a few minutes beforehand to discuss the speed write topic. After ten minutes of writing students count their words and record that word count on their progress graph. Once completed students switch and read their study partner's speed write then write two or three related 'wh' questions to ask their study partner.

'Yes/No' questions are discouraged as they often only offer dead end answers or reinforce what's already written. Students then ask their questions and comment on their study partner's work. The aim here is to again encourage students to cooperate and feel comfortable with different perspectives on the topic.

Textbook Exercises

Cooperative learning continues throughout the class including textbook work. Students are placed in mixed ability groups of four before turning their attention to their text. Here the goal is writing a paragraph based on the chapter's topic. The textbook 'Longman Academic Writing Series 1' by Linda Butler has nine chapters, which can be easily spread across the academic year. Throughout each chapter students collaborate and review their study partner's work offering corrections where appropriate, while also being encouraged to discuss solutions within their group. This process continues until the end of the chapter when students revert back to working with a single study partner towards writing a fully realized paragraph. More often than not the requirements are for students to write about their own views and experiences of the topic.

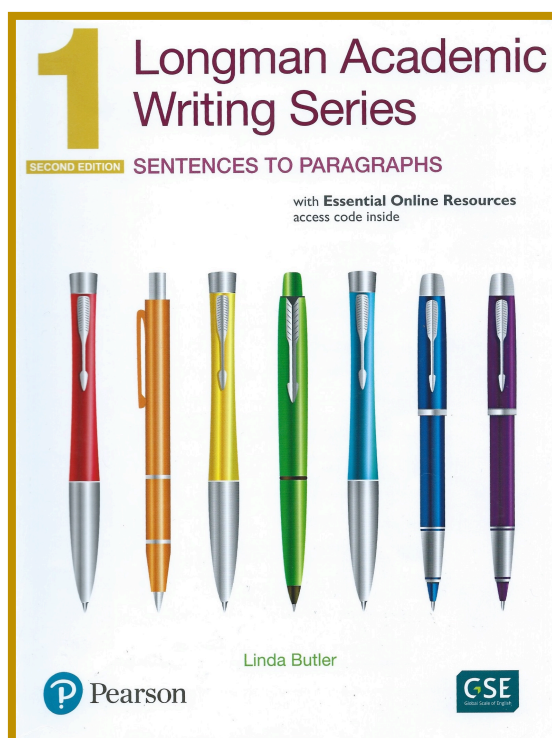


Figure 1. Classroom textbook with inbuilt peer review structures

At the end of each chapter there is a peer review process relating to the topic being developed. Here it is important to adhere to the structure set out in the textbook because it provides an extremely efficient process to guide students through the main peer review process.

Peer evaluation

The following extract is from Chapter 6. In this exercise students circle the topic, underline the controlling idea and write two supporting sentences to present evidence and show why the topic sentence is true. This exercise presents itself with an ideal opportunity for students to cooperate and review their study partner's answers.

3. There are several reasons I go to the gym.
 a. _____
 b. _____

4. Movies are more fun in a movie theater.
 a. _____
 b. _____

5. A good education is valuable for many reasons.
 a. _____
 b. _____

6. A pilot has a lot of responsibility.
 a. _____
 b. _____

Figure2. Supporting Sentences Peer Review Exercise

The final and most involved stage of peer review comes at the end of each chapter. Below is an image from Chapter 7. This is the 'Peer Review Worksheet' where students review their study partner's first draft of a fully realized paragraph.

PEER REVIEW WORKSHEET

Your partner's name: _____

Content

1. Read all of your partner's paragraph.
2. Underline any part of the paragraph you do not understand. Ask your partner to explain it.
3. Circle the topic sentence. If there is no topic sentence, write *TS?* on the paper.
4. Reread the supporting sentences. Ask questions if you want more information.
5. How did your partner organize the paragraph? On the paper, write *Time order* or *Listing order*. If the organization is not clear, write *Order?*.

Format and Language

6. Use this list to check your partner's paper. Check (✓) each item as you finish.

<input type="checkbox"/> the format of the paper	<input type="checkbox"/> the use of simple past verbs
<input type="checkbox"/> a subject in every sentence	<input type="checkbox"/> the use of commas
<input type="checkbox"/> a verb for every subject	
7. Put a question mark (?) if you are not sure about something.

Figure3. Supporting Sentences Peer Review Exercise

- Collaborate. When students complete the first draft of their paragraph they submit it to their study partner who works through each step on the 'Peer Review Worksheet'. The first section relates to content, the second to format and language. When the checklist has been completed students offer feedback to their study partner.
- Critique. By now, having worked over a period of weeks correcting and critiquing their study partner's work, students should feel more comfortable reviewing and offering ideas.
- Peer response. Criticism should always be constructive and it is important to inform students going into the final review process not to feel 'defeated' or that they didn't do a good job. So a final step is required of the reviewer here. Mainly, saying something nice about their study partner's work.

Finally, students may take into account the feedback and write another draft, this time in pen with no errors. When they are confident that this is the version they are comfortable with the student should submit it to their partner for a final reading. The finished work is then submitted for teacher input in the form of final assessment, comment and grading.

Conclusion

The usual source of feedback is often only a written comment by a teacher accompanied by a mark attached to the final version of a submitted assignment. While necessary and important, the limitation of this approach is that only the teacher's perspective is provided. A solution to this problem is to provide students with repeated cycles of peer review feedback.

Basic peer reviewing in EAP Writing A/B classes is part of an ongoing process to help students improve their work. It is not used solely at the end of a project or assignment to provide summative feedback, but as a means through which students can improve the quality of their work. Introducing and incorporating basic student peer review regularly and throughout each EAP Writing class across the academic year is

motivated by the desire to provide students with feedback that promotes a genuinely reflective cycle of learning.

Addendum

Due to the ongoing world health situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, seating arrangements were altered in the classroom to conform to social distancing regulations put in place by Chubu University in the 2020/2021 school year. The classroom seating of close pairs/groups and board work referred to in this paper relates to lessons conducted before the social distancing regulations were implemented.

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About the Author

Malcolm A. McLucas is an English instructor at Chubu University in Kasugai. He is from the UK and has been with Chubu University since 2003. Before that he was a journalist, TV presenter and producer on British television.