

## **Peer Review Instruction in the EFL Writing Classroom**

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### **Introduction**

While peer review is well-established in the writing classroom, many students lack the experience and skills to give effective feedback to their peers. Minus proper training, peer review sessions can become frustrating for teachers and students. This paper tracks a 15-week project conducted at a university in Japan in which second-year students read and gave feedback on three papers from previous classes. The three papers covered the same three topics as the students in this project were assigned during the term. The students' assessments and comments were then compared to the teacher's and discussed in the class in order to improve students' peer review skills. This form of modelling relied mainly on implicit training as students were not given explicit instruction on how to evaluate the three papers, but rather were given advice after having read the papers.

### **Literature Review**

A key problem with implementing peer review in the classroom is that students often do not understand the purpose of it. Berg (1999a) argued that peer response must be seen as a “worthwhile activity” (p. 21) for the purpose of peers

supporting each other. While the mechanics of peer review can be explained later, it must be explained to students why they are doing it.

While many students may worry their feedback is inferior to the teacher's, it should be explained to students that peer feedback may be generally different from that of a more experienced teacher, but also valuable to student writers. In addition, Rollinson (2005) described the peer feedback process as a "collaborative dialogue" among the students which can complement "the more one-way interaction between teacher and student" (p. 26).

Typically, peer feedback sessions involve students reading and evaluating each other's drafts. This side project, in conjunction with the aforementioned process, incorporates a form of modeling into the peer feedback process. Wette (2015) described this as "present[ing] flawed or exemplary text products for analysis and discussion" (p. 75). Students were asked to read and evaluate three papers from a previous year on the same topics they were concurrently working on. The students then shared their evaluations with the entire class, as advised by Berg (1999b).

Cote (2018) explained to his peer reviewers that there are four categories of statement and questions types to be presented to student writers: evaluation, clarification, suggestion and alteration. The students documented in this paper were also taught similar steps. However, for the purpose of this project, only evaluation, specifically numerical evaluation, was recorded and analyzed.

## **Methods**

This project was conducted on two second-year writing classes, consisting of 27 students majoring in English. Data for this project was collected during the first 15-week term of the school year. The students were assigned three writing projects with varied topics. The papers went through a three-draft cycle with peer feedback sessions being conducted on the second and third (final) drafts. Teacher feedback and assessment was also given on the second and third drafts.

Feedback and assessment was conducted through the use of an analytic rubric that was used by the teacher and students for all evaluations for the purposes of transparency and consistency. The rubric consisted of three grade ranges (>80%, 70–80% and <70%) and covered three criteria of the papers read: organization, language/accuracy and content. Students were instructed to choose the appropriate grading for each segment of the paper and make a check or, preferably, a text comment. Below that, students could state the perceived strengths and areas to improve. The rubric also contained a box in which students could assign a hypothetical grade to the paper they read and provided feedback on. This grading was only done on the final draft and was recorded by the teacher and not shown the original author. An abbreviated form of the rubric is shown below in Figure 1.

This project then introduced three papers from a previous year's students. The papers were anonymous and were simply labelled with the numbers one, two and three. These three papers were previously graded by the same teacher as 80, 70 and 85, respectively (A-, B- and A, respectively). These grades were not shown to the students until after they had conducted their own assessments.

These mock peer review sessions were conducted in the midst of the four-week cycles of the regular assignments and it was explained in class that their purpose was to gauge and develop peer review skills. All 27 students were given copies of the same paper and a blank copy of the rubric described earlier. Students shared their hypothetical grades with the teacher, who then averaged the

**Figure 1**

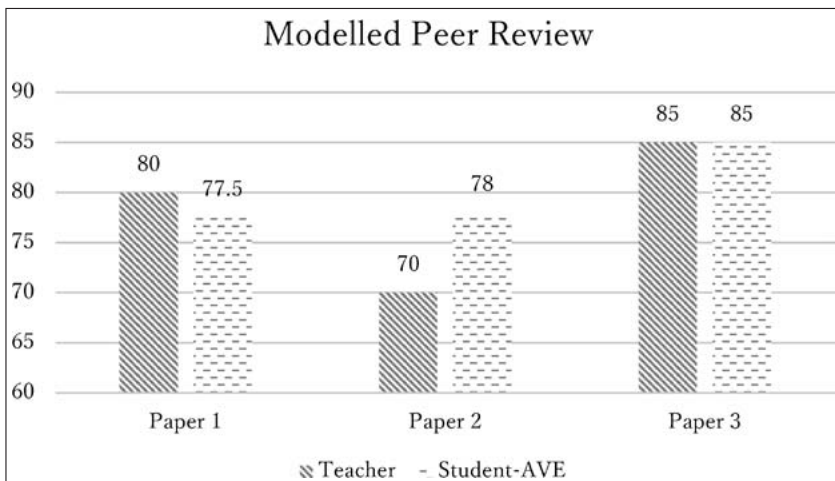
	>80%	70–80%	<70%
<b>Organization</b>			
<b>Language</b>			
<b>Content</b>			
<b>Score</b>			

scores. The original score assigned by the teacher was presented to the students to compare with the class average. The reasons for the teacher's scores were then explained to the students for the purpose of developing peer review skills.

## Results

The teacher gave the first paper a score of 80 (A-/B+) while the students' average score was 77.5. The gap, not being very significant, seems to indicate that student evaluation is rather similar to the teacher's. The second paper, given a score of 70 (B-/C+) by the teacher, received an average students score of 78. This eight-point gap is more significant and could represent a measurable difference between teacher and student evaluation. The third paper received a grade of 85 (A) from both teacher and the students. This equal result could signify a synthesizing of teacher and student assessment and even an improvement of student evaluations skills. For clarity, the data cited in this paragraph is shown below in Table 1.

**Table 1**



## Discussion

The results cited above do not show a clear or significant pattern of student improvement of giving feedback or making evaluations. The first and third papers exhibited similar (or identical) scores from teacher and students, while the second peer review exercise resulted in the student evaluation being much higher (eight points) than the teacher evaluation. Even predicted patterns of students progressing and improving over the term are not borne out by this study.

The reasons for the difference on the second paper are not clear so some speculation may help. It could be that Japanese students' general reluctance to criticize others may have influenced the resulting average. On the other hand, the issue may be more mechanical in that students lacked the skills to accurately evaluate their peers' papers. One of the more obvious issues with this study is the small sample size of only three data collection points. Another issue here is the focus solely on quantitative data. Further projects that include qualitative data from students could exhibit different patterns of student progress, thus strengthening research similar to this project.

## Conclusion

While the results of this project were not particularly conclusive, this does not mean that modelling in peer review is an invalid or pointless exercise. Instead, this project could inspire future researchers to continue to use modelling as a form of peer review instruction. As peer review is a vital part of the writing classroom, more effective techniques of peer review training can help students develop the skills needed to assist each other in becoming better writers.

## References

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