10 Guidelines for Peer Response Groups

Assembling Groups

1. The group should probably be no larger than three or four students. Students should be instructed to bring to class enough copies of their draft for each member of their group. When possible, groups should be organized along common lines of interest.

2. To work well, groups need to meet on a regular basis—at least as often as each draft is due. If the same members remain in a group throughout the semester, they often become expert readers of one another’s work.

3. If you plan for the groups to meet during class time, let each member read his or her paper out loud, once, with groups members following silently as the author reads.

4. Each member should respond to the author’s paper honestly. Praise and criticism should be mixed, but all commentary should be honest. Groups should be instructed to make general, overall comments first, saving remarks on punctuation, etc. for later, if there is time.

5. Budget the group’s time. Each member should receive at least 15-20 minutes for reading. One session can be devoted to reading proposals for projects, another for introductions, and still another for other parts of the paper.

6. The author should restrict his or her oral defense to the paper to a minimum and take good notes as group members make their comments. (As the group begins to trust one another, this part becomes easier.)

7. Instruct students to talk about the writing. The point of the group is to explore writing about the topic rather than talking about the topic in general.

8. Take the oral reading seriously, and the students will do the same. Instruct the students to try to make revisions based on the group discussion.

9. Papers should be submitted to the instructor at the next class meeting. You might also ask students to comment on their reactions to working on their writing in groups. All material should be kept in a portfolio.

10. If you prefer not devoting total class time to group work, let the group members work for half the period in groups and instruct them to finish their discussion on email. Each group should have its own distribution list, with each member receiving all the other members’ commentary.

Adapted, in part, from Fulwiler, T. Handout, 1980.
GEH—3/93