

**Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center
Hamilton College
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Tips for the Peer Reviewer

As a peer reviewer, your goal is to help the writer compose the best possible final draft. Direct all your comments toward this goal.

Step One: Identify what needs revision

Read the draft to identify strengths and weaknesses. Focus on how the draft strikes you *as a reader*. With pencil, **indicate ideas that are confusing or undeveloped**, but don't try to *rewrite* anything. You will be most helpful by identifying problems with the logic and completeness of the argument, its structure, and the clarity of expression. Don't spend time on surface features such as punctuation unless you see recurring errors.

As you read, consider making an **outline of the structure of the argument**. Start by identifying the thesis, then write the main ideas in each paragraph. Outlining helps you to see the overall logic of the argument and if any paragraphs are unfocused, do not connect to the thesis,

If your professor has provided a set of questions for you the reader, record your responses after reading the draft. If not, then summarize your responses in an end note to the writer. Begin with positive feedback and then describe the significant weaknesses you see.

Step Two: Helping the writer revise

When you discuss the draft with the writer, remember that you are a reader of the draft, not the author. Your task is to help the writer figure out how to construct a clear, substantive final draft. An effective way to accomplish this is to point out the areas that are confusing to you and to **ask the writer questions**, such as

"What are you trying to say here?"

"Can you explain how this point relates to your argument?"

"How does this evidence support your argument?"

Write down the writer's responses as he or she speaks. We often speak much more clearly than we write. By posing questions, you help the writer articulate and clarify what he or she is trying to say.

Another strategy for discussion is to **look over your outline together**, asking questions such as

"Is this the best structure for presenting your argument?"

"Can you explain how this paragraph relates to your overall argument?"

Remember:

1. Focus on the significant, substantive weaknesses first before discussing less critical concerns.
2. Don't try to rewrite anything; your job is to point out what the writer needs to revise.
3. As a peer reviewer, your job isn't to provide answers. You raise important questions about the draft, and the writer decides how to revise. Be courteous, but be honest as well.