

Assessing Projects: Encouraging Self-Direction and Collaboration Questions to Assess Critical Thinking

Peer Feedback of Critical Thinking

The following questions are provided to high school students as they review a peer's paper. These prompts help elicit constructive feedback, require critical thinking, and help focus the review on important aspects of the paper.

- What is the writer's purpose?
- What is the question-at-issue or problem being discussed?
- What is the thesis of what is being written? Paraphrase it below.
- List the main points of the paper.
- What are the writer's justifications for taking the positions he or she does?
- What is the strongest evidence for the writer's position? Why?
- What is the weakest evidence for the writer's position? Why?
- What are the implications of the advocated position?
- What are the assumptions underlying the writer's position?
- Give examples of the evidence, argument, and inferences in the paper.
- Has the writer taken into account alternative positions and opposing points of view, recognizing and evaluating evidence and key assumptions on both sides? Where?
- What is the point of view of the writer?
- Can you recognize where conclusions have gone beyond the evidence? Provide examples.
- Can you distinguish evidence from conclusions based on that evidence? Where?
- What do you find most compelling about this paper?
- What are parts don't you understand? Why?

When using these prompts during review, the reviewers must analyze content, the writer's reasoning, organization, and evidence during which time they are actively applying what they are learning about the subject matter, using critical thinking skills, and communication skills. If you ask several peers to review each paper, many insights for the writer can emerge. For example, if different peer reviewers identify different theses, then the writer knows that the writing wasn't fully understood and the thesis statement will need to be made clearer. Similarly, if most of the reviewers miss a main point, a key justification, or an important piece of evidence, the writer knows that part of the message was overlooked and needs more emphasis. What reviewers find to be the strongest and weakest evidence informs the writer about which content to highlight and which to downplay or edit out. When reviewers examine the writer's inferences, assumptions, conclusions, and implications, their own critical-thinking skills are put to the test.

The teacher can assess the peer reviewer's analysis and evaluation skills by using a rubric when reviewing their comments to the writer. The teacher can also assess the writer's ability to understand and successfully incorporate the feedback into the revision. This can be accomplished in many ways:

- The writer summarizes the feedback they received and notes the changes they made in their revised document.
- The writer completes a self-assessment of their own paper before the peer review., and then compares this with the peer review and comments.
- The writer turns the peer review into a checklist and uses it before turning in the next draft.
- The writer discusses the feedback during a conference or in a journal to help develop strategies for improvement.