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# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Collaboration is the key to innovation.

## MARY BAKER

## PEER REVIEWS

Thank you, Ms. Baker, for your willingness  
to share and collaborate!



## Benefits of Peer Reviews

A peer review is an active learning strategy that facilitates a metacognitive process of learning. The peer review is a student-to-student interaction that can be accomplished in a synchronous or asynchronous environment and provides valuable formative feedback about student learning to both the students involved and the instructor.

### How do peer reviews impact student learning?

- Students learn from the successes of others.
- Students learn from the mistakes of others.
- Students receive frequent, relevant, and formative feedback.
- Students use critical thinking skills and reflect on the learning process when evaluating.
- Students become accountable for contributing to the learning environment.
- Students learn to better assess their own work.

## What was your motivation for trying the Blackboard Peer Review?

Peer feedback is really important in a writing class, and since social distancing prevents close, in-person group work, this tool provided a way for my Writing Studies I and Writing Studies II students to get that feedback. This activity also provided another way for my students to interact with each other since we had a limited amount of time in the classroom.

Also, with this tool, students can review all drafts anonymously and even submit their drafts anonymously. This is really important for first-year writers with little confidence in their writing and their authority to offer feedback to a classmate. Students often tell me that they do not feel qualified to make writing suggestions to someone else or that they are embarrassed for someone to read their work. Anonymity gives them the opportunity to develop the skills they need to offer useful feedback and gain confidence.

At the same time, using this tool forced my students to be more active in the learning process. The peer-review assignments were very low-stakes, but everyone had the responsibility of assigning a grade to a couple of their peers. Based on what I have observed, a student may skip an assignment and hurt their own grade (especially an assignment with few points), but they may not be so eager to have a direct negative impact on the grade of someone else.

## Did you find the peer review activity beneficial for your students?

I assigned three peer review sessions in each of my classes over the course of the fall semester, and while not all students participated in each peer review, most did. Each time I read through the feedback they provided, I noticed that it was thoughtful and specific overall--they answered questions fully, pointed out specific areas that should be focused on during revision, pointed out strengths in the essay, etc. The students who completed the assignment were intentional during the entire process.

Interestingly enough, I also think that this activity was beneficial because it allowed for different timing than in a traditional classroom setting. During a traditional semester, my peer review activities take place during one class meeting. With this tool, students had a much larger window of time to perform peer evaluations. As a result, their feedback was much more detailed and potentially helpful.



## Do you plan to use the tool again?

Yes, I am planning to use it this semester in my Writing Studies I and Writing Studies II classes.

## Do you have any tips for new users?

I would encourage new users to not be discouraged if everything does not go according to plan during the first peer review assignment. Mine certainly did not—some students forgot to assign points to their peers, some submitted their drafts but did not evaluate the drafts of others, and the list goes on. As the instructor, you can control how the points are distributed, so this is a relatively easy fix until your students become more familiar with the activity. I spent time in class going through each peer review assignment step by step and posted an Announcement with very detailed instructions to accompany each assignment.

Also, Tammy Yoho is a great resource—she introduced me to the tool and has answered multiple questions as I have learned how to use it in my classes.

# STEP-BY-STEP



Blackboard

CLICK

# PEER REVIEW INSTRUCTIONS

