

Peer review exercise, paper 1

OVERVIEW

In this exercise, you will give feedback on the drafts of two or three of your peers, and each of them will also give you feedback on your draft. In particular, you will work in the following groups:

Section 2

1. Harshil, Karolina, Luis, Lindy
2. Abigail, Dawn, Don
3. Shanna, Ho Ning, Polly, Salome
4. Nancy, Ishmam, Matthew
5. Ben, Yongsong, Yue

Section 9

6. Silky, Engie, Kristen
7. Ayan, Mitchell, Kat, Young
8. Lauren, Yan, Shehryar, Kai Lin
9. Ajay, Arjav, Gary
10. Zirdi, Ziyang, Yihui

Find a block of at least two hours when all of you can meet in person. And bring enough hard copies of your paper for yourself and each of your partners. Then **each** person in the group should complete the peer review handout below for **each** of the other members of the group.

When you are done, simply go to Canvas and tell me how long you have spent on the peer review exercise. (You should spend at least 30 minutes per person – so at least 90-120 minutes in total – and please do try to spend roughly an equal amount of time on each paper.) You don't need to submit the feedback itself. When you are scheduling your peer review sessions, remember to leave some extra time before the deadline to submit this homework to Canvas!

DETAILS

Read your partner's paper from beginning to end. **Take your time and read very carefully.** For the moment, do not worry about commenting on the paper.

Next, write notes on your partner's paper in response to each of the questions below. You will give these notes to your partner at the end of the exercise, so be as specific and helpful as possible.

1. *Introduction.* Go back to the beginning of the paper. Read the introduction again. An excellent introduction should meet all of the following criteria:
 - (a) The paper prompt should not be included. Instead, the introduction should give the reader all of the information that she needs to understand what will happen in the paper.

- (b) The introduction should be no longer than two sentences.
- (c) The introduction should begin with a statement of the thesis of the paper that uses a “that”-clause.
- (d) The thesis statement should go beyond what is obvious: it should attribute to the thinker one or more ideas that are not directly stated in the text. The more deeply these ideas are buried in the text, the better!
- (e) The introduction should then provide a brief overview of the evidence for this thesis. Since the thesis will be an interpretive one, the evidence should consist of certain features of the text, such as metaphors, stories, or interpersonal evidence provided by the thinker).

For comparison, here are some sample introductions.

- Sample **bad** introduction: “In this paper, I will consider Dōgen’s views about reality and enlightenment.”
- Sample **good** introduction: “In this paper, I will argue that Dōgen holds that reality is beyond the reach of conventional human concepts, but that those concepts can nevertheless help us attain enlightenment.”
- Sample **excellent** introduction: “In this paper, I will argue that Dōgen holds that reality is beyond the reach of conventional human concepts, but that those concepts can nevertheless help us attain enlightenment. To support my interpretation, I will focus on Dōgen’s paradoxical remarks about the central tenets of Buddhism.”

Does your partner’s introduction meet all of the criteria above? If not, jot down any suggestions for improvement on your partner’s paper.

2. *Body paragraphs.* Now examine each *body paragraph* – that is, each paragraph other than the introduction or conclusion – in your partner’s paper. Look for the following features:

- (a) Each paragraph should have *just one* central idea. This idea should be stated explicitly in the paragraph – usually in the first sentence of the paragraph, though not always.
- (b) Each paragraph should clarify anything that is not obvious, such as the meanings of any technical terms. Typically these clarifications should come as soon as possible – for example, immediately after a technical term is introduced.
- (c) Each paragraph should not clarify anything that is already obvious. (If you are not sure whether something is obvious, assume that it is not.)
- (d) The central idea of each paragraph should be supported with *interpersonal evidence*, which will usually consist of an analysis of one or more quotations from the text.

Does each body paragraph meet these criteria? If not, jot down any suggestions for improvement on your partner’s paper.

3. *Quotations.* Examine any quotations used in the paper. Look for the following features:

- (a) Each quotation should contain only what is necessary to support the paper’s interpretive claims; any extra material should be cut. One effective method is to use just one or two short block quotations – see the sample paper for an example. Another effective method is to periodically insert very short quotations, typically of one sentence or less, while using ellipses (“...”) to mark whatever has been omitted.

- (b) Except in the very rare cases that it is already obvious, the meaning and significance of every quotation should be explained. This should usually be done by breaking each quotation into very small parts (unless the quotation is already very short). The paper should explain the meaning and significance of each part individually before then explaining the meaning and significance of the entire quotation.
- (c) Typically, quotation marks should not be used for just one or two words. If the words in question are ordinary ones, then no special formatting should be used at all. If they are technical terms, then they should be italicized when first introduced, and afterwards no special formatting should be used.

Are all quotations used in this way? If not jot down any suggestions for improvement on your partner's paper.

- 4. *Examples.* A strong paper will use brief but concrete examples to illustrate abstract ideas. Do note that ideas that are already easy to digest should not be illustrated with examples.

Are there any places where examples could be added or used more effectively? If so, jot them down on your partner's paper.

- 5. *Grammar and style.* Every part of the paper should be clear, concise, and grammatically well-formed. Here are some relevant criteria:

- (a) The paper should include *many* signposts – as a default, there should be at least one signpost for every two sentences. Even the first sentence of a paragraph should usually begin with a signpost to indicate how that paragraph relates to the rest of the paper.
- (b) Signposts should usually be *very concise*. Concise signposts include *thus, since, because, and, moreover, in addition, but, nevertheless, however, even though, for example, in particular, and in other words*. Wordy signposts, such as *this is because, the reason for this is that, and what this means is that*, should typically be converted into very concise signposts.
- (c) Every part of the paper should meet the rules of grammar described in the style sheet.

Make a note of any improvements that you would suggest.

Congratulations – you have now finished making notes on your partner's draft! Now carefully explain your notes to your partner. Make sure to give your partner all of your notes, and remember to **indicate on Canvas** that you have completed this assignment.

Once that is done, it is time for you to revise your own paper in light of the feedback that you have received. Keep two things in mind during this process.

First, remember that *your paper is entirely your responsibility*. Keep an open mind when your partners offer suggestions for improvement, but you are welcome to disagree with their advice! At this point, you know exactly what the criteria for an excellent paper are, and you should make your own judgments about how well your paper meets them.

Second, *make your paper amazing*. After completing the homework exercises, practicing your skills in seminar, and receiving feedback from your peers, you have all the tools that you need to create something truly exceptional. Do so – not for the sake of a grade, but for the sake of your own learning!