



Helping Students Learn Through Peer Feedback

What New Research Says About Peer Feedback

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WHAT RESEARCH FOUND

Peer feedback is often used to encourage students to review one another's work, but simply exchanging comments does not automatically improve learning. This study investigated which aspects of peer feedback actually help students develop deeper understanding and transfer their learning to new tasks.

Researchers followed 367 Advanced Placement students from five high schools in the United States as they participated in structured peer review activities. Students both provided feedback to classmates and revised their own work after receiving comments. The researchers analysed the types of feedback students gave, the revisions they made, and how their writing improved on a later assignment.

The findings showed that not all peer feedback activities contributed equally to learning. Students learned the most when they engaged in **constructive activities**, such as explaining why something needed improvement, suggesting alternative approaches, and making thoughtful revisions after receiving explanations. These activities required students to think critically, connect ideas, and generate new understanding.

By contrast, simply reading comments without revising, or making superficial changes without understanding the reasons behind them, produced much smaller learning gains. The study found that revisions played a central role in learning. Students who actively used feedback to improve their work achieved greater success on subsequent writing tasks than those who merely received comments.

An important finding was that students also benefited from giving feedback. Evaluating another student's work required them to apply assessment criteria, recognise strengths and weaknesses, and reflect on qualities of effective writing. This process strengthened their own understanding and improved the quality of their future work.

The researchers conclude that peer feedback should be viewed as an active learning process rather than an exchange of comments. Learning occurs when students explain, question, revise, and reflect—not when they simply receive advice.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Teachers often introduce peer review because it saves marking time or increases classroom participation. However, this research shows that its greatest value lies elsewhere. Peer feedback develops students' ability to evaluate quality, justify their thinking, and revise their own work independently.



Well-designed peer feedback activities encourage students to become active participants in learning rather than passive recipients of teacher comments. They also help students develop skills in communication, critical thinking, and self-assessment that extend beyond a single assignment.

CLASSROOM REALITY

Teachers Want	Students Often Experience
Meaningful peer discussions	Brief comments such as "Good job"
Careful revision	Reading feedback without using it
Independent learners	Waiting for the teacher's corrections
Thoughtful reflection	Making only superficial edits

TRY TOMORROW

Before your next writing activity:

1. Give students simple criteria to guide their peer feedback rather than asking for general comments.
 2. Encourage students to explain *why* they are making a suggestion, not just identify an error.
 3. Require students to revise their work after receiving peer feedback and explain the changes they made.
 4. End the activity with a short reflection on what students learned from both giving and receiving feedback.
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CAUTION

Peer feedback is most effective when students are taught how to provide constructive comments. Without clear expectations and guidance, feedback can become overly general, inaccurate, or focused only on praise rather than improvement.

ONE KEY TAKEAWAY

Students learn the most from peer feedback when they explain their thinking, revise their work, and actively use feedback to improve—not simply when they receive comments.

Keywords: peer feedback, constructive learning, revision, collaborative learning, writing instruction, formative assessment

Reference

Wu, Y., & Schunn, C. D. (2023). *Passive, Active, and Constructive Engagement with Peer Feedback: A Revised Model of Learning from Peer Feedback*. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 73, 102160.