Examples of peer review questions/prompts

Most peer review sessions work best when focused on one or two issues. (This is especially true when working with first-year students, but it can be true of upper-level students as well.) If you'd like peer review to cover more issues than that, consider holding more than one workshop. Bonus: focused workshops can (indeed, should!) be quite short: just enough time to read through a draft and write down answers to a few questions.

Ideas and arguments

Thesis statements

- What sentence in the introduction do you think is the writer's thesis?
- What are the most important ideas or claims the writer is expressing in the body paragraphs of the draft?
- Which of those important ideas is present in the thesis?
- Which of those important ideas is not previewed in the thesis?

Responding to other texts

- Where is the writer's account of the scholarly conversation focused on the specific topics or issues the writer is responding to? Which parts, if any, are *not* focused on those topics or issues?
- What naysayers or counterarguments does the writer need to anticipate?

Body paragraphs

Claims and topic sentences

Work through the draft paragraph by paragraph, *starting with the last body paragraph*.

- Does the first sentence or two of the paragraph make a claim about the material discussed in the paragraph? If so, put it in bold font.
    - If not, is there a claim elsewhere in the paragraph? If so, put it in bold.
- Is the claim relevant to all the material discussed in the paragraph? Either way, make a note about it.

Evidence and analysis

- In each body paragraph, underline the specific details from the text [or other appropriate type of evidence] that the writer uses as evidence for a claim.
- In each body paragraph, highlight where the writer analyzes the evidence—that is, where they explain why the evidence is significant and why it means what s/he says it does.
- Mark any paragraphs where the writer describes, summarizes, or quotes the evidence or exhibit without making claims about it or analyzing it.

Sources and quotations

- Where does the writer include examples from the primary source as evidence for claims? (Depending on the source, these examples may be quotations, summaries, images, descriptions, etc.)
- Label places where these details are integrated into the writer's own sentence(s).
- Label places where details are presented as standalone sentences.
- In the margin, note where evidence from the primary source is followed by analytical commentary that explains the example's importance and its connection to the thesis.
- In the margin, note where evidence is *not* followed by analytical commentary.
- Label any quotes for which the author is unclear.
- Does the writer include authors' names in the body of the text (not just in parenthetical citations) the first time the authors are mentioned? [NOTE: conventions about naming authors vary by discipline, so adjust as needed!]

Organization

Cut-and-tape workshop

WRITER:

- Cut your draft apart into separate paragraphs. Shuffle the paragraphs and hand the pile to someone who hasn't seen the draft already.

READER:

- Read through each paragraph, starting with the paragraph that includes the thesis.
- Find the paragraph that you think contains the draft's thesis or argument. Put it first.

- Mark and set aside any paragraphs that don't seem to support the argument or aren't clearly connected to it.
- Underline the main point of each paragraph.
- Arrange the remaining paragraphs in an order that seems logical to you. Use the main points that you identified in each paragraph as a guide.
- On a separate piece of paper, make a note of any points that the thesis promised to cover but the draft doesn't address.
- Tape the paragraphs back together in their new order.

Once you're finished, compare the organization of the original and the cut-and-taped draft. Why did each of you make the organizational choices you did? Discuss any leftover paragraphs. How can the writer more clearly connect these paragraphs to the argument?

Introductions

- Where does the introduction clearly state the writer's argument (a specific, debatable claim)?
- Where does the intro preview the writer's **reasons** for that response? (These reasons will be discussed in more detail in the body of the paper, but do you as a reader have some preliminary sense of what those reasons are?)
- Are the parts of the argument connected, or is the thesis just a list?
- If there are any logical problems, unclear transitions, or grammar that make it hard for you to follow the argument, mark them for the writer.
- Where does the introduction identify the primary source(s) being analyzed?
    - Where does it explain how the source(s) fit into the argument as a whole?
- Where does the writer explain the existing critical conversations about a) the subject in general, and b) the primary source in particular? (Acknowledging that there *isn't* a conversation counts: "While no scholarly conversations have yet discussed _____, this remix is important because it allows us to see _____.")
    - Where does the writer indicate what she or he is *adding* to the existing conversation? (Remember, even if the writer is agreeing, the paper needs to add new evidence or new ideas to further support the original argument.)
- Where does the writer define key terms, especially where those terms could be subject to multiple interpretations?

Conclusions

- Where does the conclusion repeat key language and concepts from the introduction to help tie the paper together?
- Where does the conclusion go *beyond* the introduction to explain in greater depth the argument's significance, implications, or application? (Common options are answering the questions "So what?", "Who cares?", and "What next?")

Metacommentary

- Where does the introduction provide a road map for the rest of the paper? Underline and label on the draft.
- Where do the body paragraphs use metacommentary to ward off misunderstandings, elaborate on ideas, anticipate objections, and otherwise coach readers about how to interpret the argument? Underline and label on the draft.
- Where does the conclusion use metacommentary to explain the argument's significance or otherwise help wrap up the paper? Underline and label on the draft.
- Does the paper's title describe the topic or provide metacommentary on the writer's argument? If there is no title, help the writer brainstorm ideas for one.