

Peer Review Cheat Sheet

A successful peer review often shares these characteristics:

It is human.

The best reviewers don't treat peer review like a game of whack-a-mole for errors. They instead respond in a warm and welcoming way that lets the reader know that a human being is on the other end. By taking a thoughtful and human tone, it opens the author up to your suggestions; if you don't do this your partner will likely close up and disregard them.

It is specific.

Telling a partner that a paper is "good" or "needs better flow" is not very helpful because those statements are far too broad. The best reviews are specific and precise. They offer suggestions like: "The last four sentences were short; try making at least one of them longer."

It focuses on key things.

The human brain can only absorb so many new things at once. When you review, don't try to focus on everything. That is called proofreading, and it comes later in the process. Instead, focus only on a handful of key issues.

It doesn't try to give all the answers.

Your job as a peer responder is not to fix everything. It is to give the author the reader's perspective. With that in mind, don't feel like you need to always give answers. Often a question or just stating how you experienced something can be more powerful and useful than doing the author's work for them.

It trusts itself.

You might not be an English teacher, but you know when things sound wrong, when you are confused by the organization, and when you are interested/persuaded or not. Trust that your observations are valid and worthwhile, and they will be!