



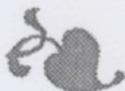
*About
the
Author*

As a junior at Georgetown, Terence McGuire started on his path as a writer by reading F. Scott Fitzgerald. Terence wrote for the Army Times while he was stationed in Panama during the Korean War. Later, after graduate study at Georgetown, Terence began doing creative writing and radio broadcasting in New Jersey.

His M.A. in Drama and Speech from Catholic University spurred his interest in directing plays and writing drama reviews. Over one hundred reviews have been printed in newspapers such as the Philadelphia Bulletin and the Camden Courier-Post, and some have been aired on the radio.

Terence left full-time teaching some years ago in favor of part-time teaching at Glassboro, radio broadcasting, and devoting much more time to his creative writing.

Peer Evaluation of Writing



Terence McGuire

My use of peer evaluation evolved from two main sources. One was from a speech course in graduate school. The professor rarely made any comments herself, but instead elicited remarks from students, focusing on a strength and weakness pattern. By the time she had finished, members of the class had made most of the points she wished to cover. It goes without saying, students are more ready to accept peer comments than a teacher's critique.

Also, in one of my first creative writing classes, I saw that many students, perhaps because this was an elective course, would hand in almost anything and call it creative writing. Rather than use grades as a cudgel, I began a process whereby the students would read and evaluate each other's work.

Here is an example of the process: If sixteen students have turned in their short stories or essays, I divide them into groups of four. The names are taken off the papers so that some degree of anonymity exists. Groups A and B exchange papers, as do Groups C and D.

Using critique sheets, each group of students decides which is the best paper read by the group. The instructor must clearly define the criteria for evaluating each set of papers. For instance, students may be asked to cite the major strengths of each paper

and suggest ways in which the paper could be improved. In both cases, students must give specific examples.

Critiquing the papers usually takes about one class period. At the next meeting, the group presents the best work to the class. When delivering the papers orally, if the assignment is an expository essay, students may focus on the paper's unity or coherence in their presentation and provide supporting examples. They may read excerpts from the paper. If the assignment is a short story, they may stress plot, character, and setting in the presentation.

As far as paperwork is concerned, while peer editing is going on, I keep the papers and critique sheets for each of the four groups in separate folders. At the end of the exercise, I clip the critique sheets to the back of the papers and return them.

With term papers, of course, considerably more time is necessary. Pairs of students review each other's papers prior to handing them in. After the peer review, more revision may be necessary. Here is a sample sheet that may be used for peer evaluation of research papers:

Research Paper Evaluation Form

Evaluator's Name: _____ Paper Title: _____

Key: P=Poor; F=Fair; G=Good

		P	F	G
Vision of Subject	Validity of Thesis			
	Organization of Whole			
Use of Sources	Clarity			
	Support			
Paragraphs	Unity			
	Transitions			
Language & Mechanics	Punctuation			
	Diction			
	Spelling			
Form	Title Page			
	Outline			
	Footnotes			
	Bibliography			
	Overall Appearance			

There are some problems with peer review. At times a particular student's work is selected for presentation too often. Some students do not read all the papers in their group. And still others never have papers in on time.

The teacher can avoid some of these problems by starting the critique process the day after the papers are due. Teachers may also mark down a late paper but include the student writer in the group activity.

Despite problems, there are real benefits in using peer editing: 1. Each student's writing receives multiple readings; 2. Good student writing receives peer recognition; 3. Students practice decision-making; 4. Group discussions reinforce writing principles; and 5. Students practice speaking to a group.

I tell the students at the beginning of the exercise that I will not be unduly influenced by their comments in grading the papers, which I read very carefully on my own. However, I do consider the comments on their critique sheets. Often there is a remark that is right on the money, and I'll add a Joycean, Yes! Yes! Also, I weed out any judo chops, such as "lousy paper." As we know, students can, on occasion, be quite callous.

In my experience, students enjoy reading and judging the writing of others. Invariably students tell one another how much they appreciate a particular paper. And weaker students have a chance to read the work of better students and see models of good writing to help them improve their own writing.