Increase Peer Review & Improve
# Your Writing Instruction

by Scott M. Petri

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Many History-Social Studies teachers are reticent to assign long-form writing tasks due to the daunting burden of grading them. With the rise of artificial intelligence, several states have opted to use robo-readers or Automated Essay Scorers (AES) to evaluate student writing, which has not gone unnoticed by machine learning critics. Over the past few years, I have experimented with blending automated writing feedback programs with in-class peer review techniques. This has enabled me to assign much more writing and

What **is** peer grading?

Students hand in their work → They give anonymous feedback → They give feedback on the feedback → The teacher gets an overview

provide students with timely feedback on several variables and exemplars of good writing.

A 2017 meta-analysis found students who engaged in peer-grading performed better than did students who did not. Schunn, et al., 2016 suggested that if multiple students assess a peer's essay using a well-designed rubric, the average of the students' ratings could potentially be used in place of a teacher-generated grade. Another interesting finding was that students did not grade themselves or peers significantly differently than their teachers did. Student self-evaluations showed moderate correlations with their teacher marks. This confirms there are pedagogical benefits to students conducting peer review across subjects and grade levels.

Recently, I have experimented with Peergrade a platform that facilitates anonymous peer review. This video explains how Peergrade works. I found the platform to be promising and hope more frequent use will flatten the learning curve for helping my students use guided peer review to improve their writing. Getting started requires the teacher to provide details on
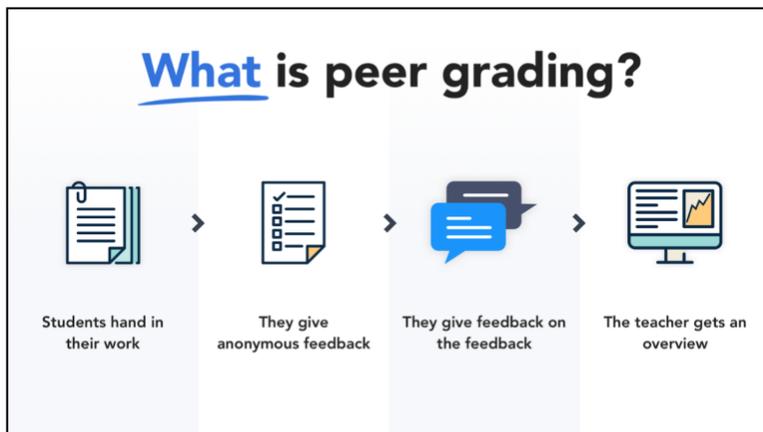
the writing assignment, a high-quality rubric, and dates for submission and feedback deadlines.

The Essay Assignment

In my 10th grade unit on the Holocaust, students are tasked with writing a Courage to Care essay, which asks them to judge the accomplishments of four individuals who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. After I created the prompt and this criteria chart, students were given seven questions to consider about three of their peers' essays.

1. How creative is the author's title? Does it make you want to read the paper?
2. List the creative title and/or suggest a better one.
3. Critique the author's background paragraph. What facts make them appear as an expert on the Holocaust?
4. Evaluate the quality of the author's evidence and explanations (analysis)?
5. Does the author use parenthetical citations?
6. How many parenthetical citations did this author include in their paper? Count them and report out as a number.
7. Describe the quality of their works cited page. Did they use alphabetical order, double-spacing, and hanging indents?

After student reviews are submitted, students receive their reviews and are allowed to rate their evaluator's feedback. If they feel something was unfair, they can flag it for the teacher's attention.

Rubrics & Review Questions

PeerGrade allows you to adapt their rubrics and has many blog posts that describe how to improve your rubrics. Obviously, the better your rubrics are, the more students understand them, and easily provide high-quality feedback. You will have to provide some direct instruction as to what is meaningful and high quality feedback. I often cut and paste highly and/or poorly rated student writing and then debrief it with the whole class. This shows students that I am reading their evaluations and makes them work harder. Look at this video to dive a little deeper into the student interface.

Final Thoughts

There are other programs like Mozi, Peerceptiv, Writable, and Turnitin's Peer Mark program all competing in this space. Others, such as the Big History Project, have created their own program called BHP Score to evaluate student writing. Teachers who expose their students to this type of immediate writing feedback are actively engaging adolescents in rich discussions about improving academic writing. This makes students more likely to revise their work. After your students complete this cycle, you will notice significant improvements in their writing.

I generally make students run a draft through an AES engine, then provide a day or two for them to conduct peer review, then I give them a week to improve their writing before I look at it. This ensures that I am able to focus on the historical content and the quality of their ideas before I give them my feedback. Have you used any of these systems with your students? If so, report your experiences in the comment section below. Let's get more teachers to use the power of peer review.

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