

Responding to a Fellow Writer's Work:

General Response Techniques

When responding to writing samples, the language used is very important. Non-judgmental remarks are used as often as possible; then suggestions for improvement are expressed in a non-threatening manner.

The object of using response techniques is to build trust among the response group members so that suggestions are taken seriously and constructively.

When responding to writing samples, always begin with positive (subjective) comments first. Then move to matter-of-fact observations (non-judgmental), and finally discuss questions and/or suggestions for improvement.

At first, responders may need to jot down the wording they plan to use before actually giving the comments to the writer. Several examples of appropriate responses will help other members of a response group get started.

Examples of Suggested Responses:

Begin with the positive

- I liked the part about...
- I think the strongest part of his/her paper/poem/story is...
- The writing reminded me of...
- I think the (dialogue/plot/characters) is/are realistic...
- I think his/her (topic sentence/support sentences/conclusion) is/are perfect because...
- I think the main idea is...

Make Observations

- I noticed...
- In the beginning of the piece he/she said/wrote...
- They used the word _____ times.
- This paragraph begins in the _____ person then shifts to the _____ person.
- I observed...
- _____ sentences started with _____.
- He/she used (action verbs/adjectives/adverbs) like...
- He/she used simple sentences like...
- He/she used compound sentences like...
- He/she used powerful words like...
- He/she used specific examples like...
- He/she explained...

Questions/Answers/Improvements

- What would happen if he/she...?
- Could he/she leave out _____ and still have the same meaning?
- How could he/she rephrase the topic sentence to capture the interest of the reader?
- I had a question about _____. Could you explain what you meant there? (To be used in the clarifying questions portion of the protocol). Or I didn't understand what he/she meant at this point—it confused me. I wonder if he/she could explain it better.
- I wonder if he/she could use a different word for _____, because...
- Could he/she start a new paragraph here?
- Could he/she combine some sentences like...?
- Could he/she explain _____ more?

In following some of these suggestions, you may be able to get closer to the real issues with the paper. We are trying to focus on the *craft* of writing, which means looking at how well the author has put their writing together. If we are honest and direct in what he/she has done well, and help them in realizing what things they might need to fix, we will help each other improve. (If their words are unclear to you as a reader, they are most likely going to confuse someone else).