Peer assessment, also called peer review, is an instructional approach that allows learners to consider, evaluate, and provide feedback on the level, value, or quality of the intellectual product of an “equal-status” learner - a peer (Topping, 1998). Although the practice is typically associated with language and composition courses, it can be used successfully in a wide breadth of courses, including STEM, law, health, and business management (UBC, 2015).

The University of Strathclyde Glasgow’s project, Re-Engineering Assessment Practices (REAP) in Higher Education (2010) refers to research in higher education demonstrating that learning is “deeper, more sustainable and satisfying when students become responsible partners in their learning.” In order to achieve this, students must be actively involved in various learning processes, including opportunities that allow them to assess their own work and the work of others. The REAP report (2010) indicates that over time this will allow students to “develop their ability to monitor, evaluate and manage their own learning without relying on the expertise of the teacher,” and that these skills will help them to become independent, self-reliant learners beyond their formal education.

Peer assessment typically consists of students giving feedback to peers’ work using criteria common to the assignment, usually in the form of a rubric (University of British Columbia, 2015). According to Carleton College’s Science Education Resource Centre (Guertin, 2018), there are usually four parts to the peer assessment process:

1. **Writing:** the student writes the proposed assignment
2. **Training:** students are given basic training around how to evaluate work and give constructive feedback.
3. **Peer Assessment:** students exchange work with other students and give constructive, helpful feedback.
4. **Self-Assessment:** Students go over their own work again in order to assess where changes can be made.

This activity may be conducted in or outside of class using pen and paper, or through a mediated online system such as D2L or Google Docs (Guertin, 2018). Students given an opportunity to participate in this process benefit not only from reviewing or assessing the work of their peers, but also from receiving reviews from others (JISC, 2015).

**Why is peer assessment important?**

Peer assessment is effective because it gives students the opportunity to both give and receive feedback - two very different types of activities. **Giving feedback** is proactive: it requires students review content and make comparative judgements using the assignment criteria, and summarize their opinions in a coherent way. **Receiving feedback**, on the other hand, gives students an opportunity to think about their work in a different way, reflecting on where improvements can be made (JISC, 2015).

According to JISC (2015), giving students an opportunity to produce peer feedback and to make judgements that are based on criteria set out in assignments helps them to **develop critical thinking skills** that are important to future academic and professional practice. Other research has shown that
the true benefit of peer assessment comes from giving students the opportunity to **reflect on their own work** through the process of comparison. Even though it is often the case that students will receive a weak level of feedback from peers, the process of evaluating someone else’s paper allows them to understand more clearly what approaches and techniques work and don’t work.

A survey implemented by Moore and Teather (2013) assessed how students react to the opportunities given to them in relation to peer assessment. The students who found the exercise useful found value in the opportunity to learn how to read critically, learning what to do (and what not to do), and gaining insight into what they could have done better. The students also found that going through the process of peer assessment allowed them to **recognise the strengths and gaps in their own work**, helped to **clarify expectations for assignments**, assisted them in the completion of their assignments, and helped them to **develop a set of practical skills in the area of evaluation and feedback**.

Here are some additional benefits, as well as some challenges to the peer assessment process, as outlined by the University of British Columbia’s Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (2018):

### Planning In-Class Peer Assessment: Tips and tricks

#### Benefits

- Because students are considered active participants in the learning process; the process itself is considered **active learning**. This increases the student’s active engagement with the work that they are producing (Oxford Brookes, 2016).

  - **Exposes students to the work of their peers**; through this process, students can identify the differences between a paper that is well written, and a paper that can be improved significantly.

  - Typically used as **formative assessment**, and therefore helps a student, as well as an instructor, to understand how well that student is doing. It also increases the amount of feedback that a student receives.

  - Commenting on the work of others helps students to **identify disciplinary standards** and to apply these to their own work.

  - Allows for **collaboration between students**.

  - **Increases critical thinking skills** because the feedback that students provide will require justification and explanation.

  - Has the potential to **improve students’ final products** as well as writing skills in general.

#### Challenges

- Preparing for peer assessment can **increase the instructor’s workload**. For example, students require training and support in order to produce useful/constructive feedback.

- **Feedback can be inaccurate** due to friendships or peer pressure, although this can be alleviated through the process of anonymization.

- The consistency/quality of student feedback can be uneven.
Even though peer assessment is an important part of both the scientific and academic process, students may go through their entire undergraduate career without having the opportunity to participate in a student peer assessment process (Guertin, 2018). This is typically because many instructors feel that the process is too time consuming for the results that it produces. However, taking the steps to organize peer assessment processes can streamline the peer assessment process. Additionally, there are a variety of technological tools that can make the process more straightforward.

The University of Colorado’s Writing Centre has developed helpful guidelines that outline the considerations and planning needed in order to make the process run smoothly. Follow it to integrate peer assessment into your own classroom. Additionally, the Centre for Excellence in Assessment at Brookes University (n.d.) outlines numerous tips that can be applied when using peer assessment in the classroom. These are divided into several categories including training, planning, and facilitation. The steps below adapt suggestions from both.

**Step One: Preparing Students for Peer Assessment**

- Think about what you would like students to accomplish in the session. Explain to students at each step of the way the pedagogical reasoning for the activity. Let them know they can improve their own work by critically analyzing the work of others.
- Facilitate the marking or evaluation process by giving students practice in providing assessment and feedback:
  - Give them a sample assignment and assessment (ideally similar to assignment that will be peer assessed)
  - Ask students to individually grade and give feedback on the sample assignment using specific rubrics, criteria, or worksheets (see below). Students will contribute more if they can write directly into an electronic form or document, rather than simply listing responses on the board.
  - Discuss and compare evaluations in a group setting (or through activities such as think pair-share).

**Step Two: Planning the In-Class Peer Assessment Session**

- Choose an appropriate assignment to undergo peer review - aim for three pages or less in terms of assignment length. Plan enough time for reading and assessment.
- Ask student to bring in sufficient copies of their assignment to share with their peers.
- Either allow students to choose who they exchange their assignments with or anonymize the process.

**Step Three: Facilitating the In-Class Peer Assessment Session**

- Actively facilitate, ensuring that students have access to the rubric to be used.
- Model how to use the evaluation form or rubric. This will help students understand expectations.
- Adhere to a strict timetable, but give enough time for the assessment process.
- Explain to students what they should do, and for how long - give students x minutes per assignment.
- You can read a sample and see if feedback is on track
Sample Questions for Peer Assessment Worksheets

The Writing Studio at Colorado State University has developed and shared a series of worksheets that can be used for peer assessment purposes. Here are some sample questions that you can use for inspiration when planning a peer assessment exercise:

1. Imagine that you are the writer’s opponent in a debate. What are the weaknesses in their arguments?
2. If there is a thesis or claim, what is it? Any suggestions for improving the thesis or claim?
3. What are the writer’s main supporting arguments?
4. What counter-arguments does the writer refute?
5. What counter-arguments can you think of in addition to those above? (Remember, you are the writer’s opponent.)
6. What is the audience for the paper you’re assessing?
7. What suggestions can you make for a stronger opening for the paper? Suggest two changes or improvements. Denote how this targets a particular audience.
8. Does the conclusion provide proper closure to the arguments made by the writer? Suggest improvements for your partner.
9. Are adequate transitions used between paragraphs? Are topic changes smooth?
10. Is there enough sentence variety? Is vocabulary varied? If yes, identify this and point it out to your partner.
11. Is the vocabulary used in the correct way? Has the writer chosen the right word to convey what they mean? If you notice that it is not, point this out to your partner.
12. Any last advice before the writer goes on to the next draft?

Planning Online Peer to Peer Assessment

It is also possible to conduct peer assessment in an electronic environment. This can be done through the sharing of texts with peer assessment readers through D2L, Google Drive, or even through email. Participants share digital files, and also give feedback electronically. This can be as straightforward as adding comments in a Word document or Google Doc. Feedback could also be delivered via an electronic worksheet set up in Google Forms.

Interested in integrating peer assessment into your classes using one of these tools? Contact the Digital Media Projects Office (DMP): https://www.ryerson.ca/digital-media-projects/
Work Cited


https://serc.carleton.edu/sp/library/peerreview/index.html


MIT Comparative Media Studies/Writing. (n.d.). *No One Writes Alone: Peer Review in the Classroom - A Guide For Students.* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tY8CXoJ3ILc


