Students will workshop the original versions of their letter to the editor papers within a pre-selected peer group. Copies of the paper to be reviewed should be made available to each member of the peer review group in advance of the in-class workshop. This will allow peer group members to read and critically analyze the paper, and to respond in writing with a peer review. A copy should also be made available to the Professor ahead of the workshop session.

Ahead of each workshop session, each student will be responsible for clear, cogent peer reviews (1-2 pages in length each) of each paper workshoped. If there are four members of a peer review group, then each student will be responsible for THREE peer reviews, one per paper (not counting their own, of course). You should also be ready to discuss and elaborate on these reviews in the subsequent peer review session.

This handout is designed to provide suggestions regarding how to think about the written peer review as well as how to read and evaluate the paper itself in advance of writing up the peer reviews. In class we will then break up into peer review groups, where you will share your peer reviews with each other, spend time working through each of the three papers, and discussing them with an open mind. The goal is to produce better, clearer, and more focused revisions.

To that end, please be sure to do the following in advance of the in-class peer review session:

1. Read the papers, and mark them up according to the guidelines noted below in Appendix A.
2. Write up the peer reviews with the guidelines and suggestions in Appendices B & C in mind.

In addition, please bring the following to the in-class peer review session:

1. Your marked-up copy of each paper (NOTE: be ready to use to discuss each paper, and to hand over to the paper’s author at the end of the session)
2. THREE copies of each peer review you write – one for each paper’s author, one for you, and one for the instructor.
3. An open mind regarding your own paper!

Gary King (2006) provides a good discussion of this kind of peer review process ["Publication, Publication." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 39, 1: 119-125]: "The reason academics hang out together in universities is not (necessarily) because we like each other; it's because our work gets better in the process of interacting... But it is an implicit quid pro quo: If you want others to read your work, make sure to give them detailed comments too" (King 2006, 120).
APPENDIX A. SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWERS: ANALYSIS & REVIEW WRITE-UP

Now you have drafts of three papers to work through. Give yourself enough time to really focus on each draft. Remember to make your comments legible—you might want to use a pencil—and to focus on both the BIG PICTURE issues and grammar and style, especially if the latter obscures the main ideas of the paper. Use the marked-up draft as you write up your official Peer Review, and to guide discussion during the in-class Peer Review session.

1. Write your name and email address on the top right-hand corner of each peer draft. That way, if there's any confusion later, your peer can contact you to clear it up.

2. Read through the paper once quickly. Resist the temptation to jump in with specific comments until after you've read through the whole paper once. Mark passages you think you might like to return to later - either because they interest you or confuse you.

   • **Underline** what you take to be the best depiction(s) of the author's main argument, or thesis.

   • Place a star (*) by points that interest you and comment on what you're interested in.

   • Place a question mark (?) beside large passages that you have difficulty understanding, and a wavy line under shorter phrases/sentences that you aren't following.

   • Now go back, and draw out your comments further (write directly on the drafts). Feel free to comment on any number of issues in the paper, but be sure to deal with these:

      • On a scale of 1-5 (5=high), how engaging did you find the introduction to their argument? Why? Were you engaged with the topic right away? How might the author better grab your attention?

      • Does the author's argument seem complete, or do elements of it need to be better substantiated, or developed further? Explain why you feel this way, and provide suggestions as to how, if possible.

      • Note any places where the argument or analysis seems less than convincing. Explain why.

3. On the back of the paper, **note answers to the following**:

   a. What do you take as the focus or main point of this draft?

   b. What, specifically, interested you about the draft? What were its main strengths?

   c. What is the single most important revision or set of revisions that your peer could make?

   d. Can you suggest sources or other relevant arguments that might enhance the next draft?

APPENDIX B. RATIONALE FOR WRITING PEER REVIEWS

Peer reviews expose the referees and the author to new ideas and perspectives. Learning the mechanics of review writing can never substitute for full comprehension of the material, but it can transform the review into a constructive document. At the same time, there are simple rules for identifying flaws in the paper that greatly simplify review preparation and allow the referee to concentrate on the paper's content.

Why is a review necessary?
The peer review serves several roles, although the precise combination varies with the type of review. The most important reasons for review include finding deficiencies in approach and analysis or ignorance of related research.

Each of these categories requires a referee with broad knowledge of the topic to recognize these deficiencies. Usually a referee will sense that something is wrong with an argument, and then trace it back to assumptions or evidence. No self-respecting researcher wants such errors publicized, so the review process limits the "humiliation" to a much smaller circle.

Reviews are also useful to detect style and grammar that confuse the reader. Certainly the author will want the paper read, understood, and appreciated by as many people as possible. It is in his or her interest to repair these problems before the paper is submitted to a wider audience.

The kind of review that you are engaging in is often called a "friendly" review. In such cases, the reviewer is known to the author. The timid reviewer may be reluctant to harshly criticize a paper, so these tend to be less valued than an anonymous review (although a true friend should be a constructive but severe critic in order to help the friend produce the best work possible).

What Do I Write in a Review of a Paper?
(1) Title and author of paper [and for this assignment, write your name as reviewer]: Note that if this were a journal submission, the reviews would be anonymous.

(2) Summary of paper: This needs to be only 1-3 sentences, but it demonstrates that you understand the paper and can summarize it concisely.

(3) Good things about the paper (one paragraph): It's important to identify what works in the paper, so that the author does not change those in subsequent revisions. It is also good psychology if you are going to engage in criticism of an author's writing to first praise, then point out flaws.

(4) Major critical comments: Discuss the author's arguments, technical approach, analysis, conclusions, etc. Be constructive, if possible, by suggesting improvements.

(5) Minor critical comments: This section contains comments on style, grammar, etc. If any of these are especially poor and detract from the overall presentation, then they might escalate to the 'major comments' section. It is acceptable to write these comments in list (or bullet) form.

APPENDIX C. PEER REVIEW GUIDELINES: HONESTY AND COMPASSION

Five precepts or guiding principles inform this course and this assignment:

1) Writing is a mode of thinking
2) Writing is a social activity
3) Always write multiple drafts
4) Question assertions and assumptions, especially your own
5) Become observer-participants in your own education

Engaging in peer review puts all these precepts into practice. You are providing your best attention to someone else’s writing. This is a sign of respect. The worst peer response is to say nothing, which suggests two things to the writer: you think the writing is really bad but you’re not honest enough to say so; 2) the writer and her work are not worth your time and attention.

At this level of writing competence, your Hierarchy of Concerns when reading a text should be:

- Content/Ideas
- Organization
- Style
- Mechanics

Here’s some advice on how to be a good peer reviewer:

1. Be honest and clear
2. Ask specific questions or make specific observations that relate to specific places in the text.
3. Be able to articulate your feelings and ideas—Why do you feel a certain way? Why do you think what you do? What is it in the text that elicits your response?
4. Challenge the writer's ideas; share your own ideas.
5. Make use of your own experience and knowledge when applicable.
6. Whenever possible, write comments or make marks in the margins.

Remember that you are not rewriting or correcting the text. You are sharing your own analysis and thoughts about the text with the writer. Convey your thoughts and feelings in a way that the writer can readily accept. You can be honest and informative without sounding overly critical.

Revised version of document found at:
http://www.clark.edu/Library/PDF/eng101_porter_fall04_peer_rev_guide.pdf

APPENDIX D. PEER REVIEW GROUPS

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