Writing Groups Guidelines

For writers

1. Bring one copy of your piece for each member of your group, and one for yourself.

2. When it is your turn to read, don’t introduce (or apologize for) your essay — just read it aloud.

3. After reading your essay aloud, allow time for your readers to read it through again, silently, and make brief notes. During this time you can make notes on anything you noticed when reading.

For readers

1. Don’t take notes as the piece is read aloud. Notice how the words strike you, whether you are with the writer or your mind wanders, whether the piece proceeds gracefully from one idea to the next, whether it makes sense or you find yourself confused, and so on.

2. As you read the piece silently a second time, make notes in the margins, telling the writer things like the following:
   (a) What you especially like about the essay.
   (b) What confuses you, and where you are most confused.
   (c) What parts need more information.
   (d) What ideas need more support to be convincing or meaningful.
   (e) What sections, in any, might be cut or omitted.

3. In giving feedback aloud, you might say the following kinds of things:
   (a) Your opening seems predictable (or boring)—how can you draw the reader in?
   (b) You are getting too far off the subject here.
   (c) Can you give an example of this?
   (d) I think you need some sensory details (color, shape, texture, etc.) to help your reader feel or understand this.
   (e) I think you need more quantitative detail (numbers, size, statistics, etc.) here to support your point.
   (f) The main point (or best part) of this paragraph is buried—how can you emphasize it?
   (g) I started to lose interest here . . .
   (h) This part works well (or doesn’t) because . . .
   (i) Your closing seems vague or unclear. What point do you want to leave the reader with?
   (j) What is your point here?

4. Do not comment on spelling, grammar, or usage unless it gets in the way of understanding the writer.

5. As a rule, do not “grade” the piece overall as excellent, good, bad, etc. More specific praise or suggestions are much more useful.

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1Thanks to Jan Allister.