

# Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

## Using Google Docs for Peer Review

### Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

For this innovative teaching practice, this writing and composition instructor digitally reimagines traditional peer review processes using Google Docs. This exercise encourages students to build conversational skills around developing and delivering written feedback.

The instructor first walks students through the process of accessing their college-assigned Google drive and working with Google Docs. The instructor then places students in “feedback groups” of three or four. Each student creates a folder in their Google drive and “shares” it with their group and the instructor. Each member then uploads a rough draft into their folder either as a Google Doc or as a Microsoft Word document. If a student uploads a Microsoft Word document, they will have to convert it to Google Doc format. The instructor shows students how to change their share settings for the document so that it is editable by all team members.

To begin the peer review, team members open another member’s rough draft via the shared Google drive folder. The instructor asks students to provide their feedback through comments placed in the margins of the paper. To guide the review, the instructor asks students to focus their comments on the writer’s ideas rather than the grammar and mechanics of the writing.

The instructor asks reviewers to address three questions: “What do you like?”, “Where are you confused?”, and “Where do you want to know more?”

To avoid overly critical feedback, the instructor asks reviewers to phrase comments as “I-statements.” For example, comments like “You need to change this” must be written as “I’m confused, you keep saying ‘he,’ but I am unsure if ‘he’ is your grandfather or uncle.” The instructor encourages students to offer comments in response to peer feedback and models this by participating in the review process.

As group members evaluate one another’s work, the instructor provides simultaneous feedback. To illustrate, the instructor might insert a comment agreeing with a group member’s previous comment such as: “I also want to know more; can you provide more background information?” The instructor’s digital monitoring and participation clarifies expectations and increases learner accountability. The instructor privately confers with disengaged students to remind them of expectations outlined in the provided rubric.

This peer review activity increases student engagement because students receive written feedback, actively respond to comments, and ultimately revise their rough drafts. Additionally, students build their vocabulary to more clearly discuss their own writing and that of their peers.