Making Peer Review Productive

Why Peer Review?
There are plenty of reasons why instructors encourage peer review, but here are a few that are relevant to you as a writer.

- It gives you an authentic response from a reader—without judgment.
- It allows you to “test out” your ideas and ask questions of peers.
- It allows you to analyze your own writing by looking closely at what others are doing. If you see something that’s working well (or not working at all) in your peer’s paper, look for that same thing in your own and revise accordingly.

Your Role: Writer
The writer’s role doesn’t stop once the draft is handed over to someone else. Getting the most out of a peer review means actively participating.

- Make your goals, questions, and concerns clear before you start. Talk to the reviewer about what you’re looking for, so they can focus on the parts you want to focus on.
- Listen and take notes. Ask clarifying questions, but don’t argue with your reviewer. Keep in mind that you don’t have to take the suggestions you were given.
- Don’t be afraid to ask for more—more feedback, more explanation, more suggestions. If you feel like your reviewer hasn’t addressed your concerns or has given vague responses, ask.

Your Role: Reviewer/Reader
The reviewer role can sometimes be intimidating, especially if you’re new to the process or working with people you don’t know well. Peer review is most productive when the reviewer takes their role seriously. Keep the writers questions and concerns in mind. Feel free to comment on other things you notice, but the writer’s goals should be your goals as well.

- Respond as a reader. Being an expert or “playing teacher” is not your responsibility, so don’t put the extra pressure on yourself to “correct” the paper.
- Don’t be afraid to say what you think. You are a capable reader and therefore always have something to contribute to a peer review session.
- Balance your constructive criticism with positive feedback. Don’t forget to point out what you like and why you like it.

Not sure what to say?
Sometimes even experienced peer reviewers have trouble figuring either what to say or how to say it. Here are two tricks to help put emphasis on your reactions to the paper while still giving the writer useful feedback.

- Respond with “I” statements:
  - "I got confused about..."
  - "I'd like to know more about..."
  - "I wonder..."
  - "I especially thought this part was strong because..."
- Respond using the “Say Back” method:
  - “This is what I think you meant”
  - “This is what the writing made me think about”
  - “This is what I expect to come next.”