Peer Group Activity Guidelines

Revision Mode

Goals:
This kind of writing group meets on days when first and second drafts of major papers are due. This group has a very clear and definable goal--to improve papers.

Directions:
1. Each group member will come to class with a draft of a paper in progress. One person will start by reading her/his paper aloud to the group. During the first reading, group members should merely listen and not take notes. Then the reader will read the piece again, and this time group members will make comments that fall into three different categories: (+), (-), and (?). These symbols mean, roughly, I liked X, I did not like Y, and I did not understand Z. After the second reading, group members will respond to the reader (one at a time) using their notes as a guide. You should try to find at least one thing that you liked about a piece, and then move on to your other comments. (Note: The writer is NOT allowed to respond to the reviewers at this stage.) Once each of the reviewers has finished, this cycle will be repeated for the next person's paper.
2. For this system to work, it's imperative that people respond openly and honestly. If something makes you mad, say so. It's also important that people disagree. There will be times when one group member dislikes something that another group member liked. This is okay. It helps to get various points of view on your work. Lastly, it's an important feature of this system that the person reading the paper is not allowed to respond to the peer reviewers. While peers are reviewing the essay, the writer should listen and take notes. In the long run, it's up to him/her to decide what to do with peers' comments. Writers may accept or reject comments as they wish. I firmly believe that defending the work makes peers less willing to offer constructive comments in the future. Writers cannot afford to be defensive.

Helpful Hints

1. Don't worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Your time will be better spent discussing word choice, sentence structure, paragraph structure, and the ideas expressed in the paper.
2. Do not be afraid to say "I don't understand." If you don't understand something, you're probably not alone.
3. Try to explain why you feel the way that you do. When you like something, tell the writer specifically what you liked and why you liked it. The same applies for things you dislike. Sometimes, however, this will not be possible. I still can't explain why I like broccoli, but I do. It's a valid feeling even if I can't explain it.