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Peer Reviewing Sources

A Framework-Informed Approach to Information Literacy in First-Year Writing

Scholarship on peer review has demonstrated its value for students.[1] Standard peer review processes, however, tend to focus on students' writing rather than their engagement with the sources they work with, leaving the evaluation of students' information literacy skills to instructors.[2] In the course of our research, we observed in interview transcripts that minoritized students, in some cases, had very different experiences with sources than their majoritized peers, describing strategies for navigating and redressing sources that were biased against some aspect of their identity. Our research team's work on information literacy has shown that (1) students need support in their writing about popular sources; (2) minoritized students demonstrate superior critical information literacy skills compared to majoritized students; and (3) standard measures of assessment often overlook the superior information literacy skills that minoritized students possess.[3]

To support students' writing about popular sources, our team of two undergraduate student researchers, one librarian, and two faculty members has created a tool for peer review of research and source use. This tool addresses some of the problems with peer review identified by the student members of our team and uses an asset-based approach to foreground the sophisticated information literacy skillset, which our research suggests that minoritized students are more likely to hold.

This tool—which provides a way to engage students with the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Scholarship as Conversation frame—was built on our research findings about minoritized students' awareness of the concept of contextual and constructed authority, and our peer review tool draws on the authority constructed by the experience of our student researchers.[4]

Reflection

Because of the critical role of experience and identity in our research and the development of this tool, we begin with personal reflections by the undergraduate research team members.

Bryce Nishikawa

As a student during the pandemic years, I had a unique experience with peer review activities, since they were conducted in a remote environment. I found it difficult to sustain my engagement in academic work without the social opportunities that college normally

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affords. In my first-year English courses, my peers and I partook in peer review activities to facilitate inter-classroom camaraderie and obtain a second perspective. However, due to distance learning, the time and effort devoted to providing thorough feedback was not always even, which meant peer review activities yielded varying results in improving student work.

Later interactions with peer review activities, which altered the protocol for assessment by requiring feedback on areas the author did well alongside areas for improvement, fostered more enriching takeaways. After the peer review process, the author and reviewer came together to discuss the choices made and reflections on them. The conversations inspired me to critically reflect on my writing and identify alternatives that would strengthen my capacities as a scholar. The emphasis on both exceptional and underdeveloped aspects of the student writer's work also removed the burden of needing to tread between offering feedback but not to the extent that peers may feel offended or discouraged. I came to appreciate that everyone progresses at their own pace as a scholar, but is never done learning. I hope to share with others the tools that shaped these fruitful interpersonal interactions.

Julia Kovatch
Prior to this project, my experience with peer review activities was limited. I completed an asynchronous introductory writing course at a community college in the spring of 2020. In that class, students anonymously traded papers with each other and left comments primarily focusing on writing mechanics and the main arguments of each other's papers. Peer review activities in my other classes never included a review of the sources I cited in my papers. Similar to Bryce's experience in first-year writing, I often felt that peer review activities did not provide much value to my writing process or the end result. The impersonal nature of asynchronous and anonymous peer review activities combined with their primary focus on mechanics meant that I did not focus my time or energy on information literacy skills.

As a research assistant for this project, I gained a new perspective on different source attributes and how students used them in their writing through the collaborative nature of our coding process. By double-coding each source and then discussing our choices to reconcile the data, each member of the research team developed a stronger understanding of our coding categories. Having to explain my reasoning helped me develop my metacognitive awareness of information literacy. The back-and-forth conversations about each source and how a student wrote about it were critical to growing my critical information literacy skills, and I think this feature is too often missing in peer review activities.

Peer Review Tool

The peer review tool we created asks student reviewers, first, to read one of the sources that a peer incorporated into their writing and, using table 1, to assess the source using four categories of analysis: source content, source type/genre, source venue, and author expertise.

Table 1. Reviewer Source Analysis

Briefly make note of the following:	Source content	Source type/genre	Source venue	Author expertise
	Describe what the source is about, the perspective(s) presented, any biases, and how the claims are written and supported.	Note the genre of the piece (or attributes of it), the audience it is intended for, writing mechanics utilized, and how the claims are conveyed.	Analyze the site where the piece was published. Is the site well known? What are its affiliations? Does the source fit with the nature of the venue?	What information about the author's life, credentials, and/or affiliations is available? What do we know or not know about the author?

After reviewing the source independently, the peer review tool has student reviewers turn to the student writer's use of the source. As seen in table 2, the peer reviewer uses the same four categories of analysis to assess how the source is used in the student writer's paper: source content, source type/genre, source venue, and author expertise.

Table 2. Reviewer Writing Analysis

Strengths	Criteria	Suggestions for Improvement
	Source content Does the information used in the student writer's paper accurately represent the information in the original source? Does the student writer include the source's argument in its entirety? Does the student writer accurately portray opinions and/or biases of the original source?	
	Source type/genre How does the student writer represent the genre of the source? Does the student writer make note of instances when the genre was unclear? Is the source type crucial to understanding the content or context?	
	Source venue How does the student writer represent the publication the source came from? Does the student writer comment on how they evaluated the trustworthiness of the information or venue? Is the source venue crucial to understanding the content or context?	
	Author expertise Does the student writer accurately represent the author's relationship to the source content, including any special expertise or personal stakes in the issue they are discussing?	

When the reviewer has completed tables 1 and 2, they meet with the student writer to discuss their feedback on the way the source was incorporated into the paper. The reviewer grounds their response to the student writer's incorporation of the source into the paper in the independent analysis of the source they did before reading the student writer's work. The tool thus scaffolds both the reviewer's understanding of the source and the student writer's engagement with it.

Discussion

This peer review tool draws on our experience as researchers and seeks to address the previous positive and negative experiences of peer review described by Bryce and Julia. In developing this tool, Bryce and Julia drew on the coding categories our research team had developed to identify key components we felt were most important to include.

ACRL states that its "Framework depends on these core ideas of metaliteracy, with special focus on metacognition, or critical self-reflection, as crucial to becoming more self-directed in that rapidly changing ecosystem."[5] The results of our study and our student researchers' experiences illustrated the importance of conversation as a source of metacognitive meaning-making, which is why we made constructive discourse about source use a key component of our peer review tool.[6] This tool was developed out of the findings of our research that revealed how identity and experience shaped students' critical information literacy skills, as well as how students interacted with sources.

This peer review tool improves students' information literacy skills by synthesizing our student researchers' experience and the lessons learned from reviewing student work. The tool is a model for inter-classroom activity that centers the Scholarship as a Conversation frame. Where our student researchers' experiences with peer review were ambivalent-to-negative, our tool reengages students in conversations with both sources and their peers' writing. Students are prompted to review their peers' work critically in ways that identify strengths and areas for improvement regarding the student writer's choices. The conversation between the peer reviewer and student writer that follows is a site for the development of critical reading and writing skills. In the conversation that concludes the peer review activity, the reviewer shares their findings with the writer, who is then encouraged to defend their source interpretation or consider how to incorporate the reviewer's feedback into future drafts. The result of this process is the evolution of both the student writer's scholarship and their metacognitive information literacy skills. Student writers have the opportunity to use their voices in these purpose-driven conversations, which allows them to contribute and benefit from a diversity of opinions because they comprehend that their peer reviewers are working to improve their capacities as scholars rather than working to critique and belittle.

Conclusion

In analyzing multiple aspects of sources from different perspectives, students acknowledge that scholarly conversations extend beyond traditional academic venues and learn new ways to contribute to scholarship. The peer review process exposes students to others' interpretations of sources, encouraging them to see and accept ambiguity in different formats of information. Additionally, minoritized students are invited to bring their superior information literacy skills to the classroom, without coercing them to display those skills publicly or requiring these students to educate teachers or peers. The tool is an example of an asset-based approach to developing equitable learning tools that foregrounds scholarship and interpersonal relationships. �＞

Notes

1. Kristi Lundstrom and Wendy Baker, "To Give Is Better Than to Receive: The Benefits of Peer Review to the Reviewer's Own Writing," *Journal of Second Language Writing* 18, no. 1 (2009): 30–43.

2. It is notable that none of the chapters in *Rethinking Peer Review* focus on source use. Phoebe Jackson and Christopher Weaver, eds., *Rethinking Peer Review: Critical Reflections on a Pedagogical Practice* (Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse; Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2023).

3. Julia Voss, Nicole Branch, and Loring Pfeiffer, "Assessment is Constructed and Contextual: Identity, Information Literacy, and Interview-Based Methodologies in the First-Year Writing Classroom," under review at *The Journal of Writing Assessment.*

4. Scholarship as Conversation and Authority is Constructed and Contextual are two of the six frames in the Association of College and Research Libraries Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, January 11, 2016, https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

5. Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, p. 3.

6. Voss, Branch, Pfeiffer, "Assessment is Constructed and Contextual."