Writing in Small Groups - DRAFT -

Pandemic Edition

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In this booklet:

Response Lenses

Working with Prompts

Generating

Live-writing

Working with Readings

Dealing with small group Problems

Note: This is intended to be printed, hardcopy, as a booklet.

Note 2: The Pandemic Edition currently only differs in the instructions for Sloppy Baskets (requires whiteboard) and doing Skeleton Feedback, because it was impossible to do our process without breakout rooms or something fancy.

We can add more troubleshooting tips, or notes about using the whiteboard with different students technologies, but We have to collect it first. Email me if you have something along those line that you think would help future tutors.

Choosing a Lens

We've tried to put the lenses in this booklet in the order that's best for learning them. This isn't absolute. You could shuffle the order a bit and it would probably be okay. But we've found students have an easier time responding in certain ways—for example, asking for amplification (More About)—and initially we want to take advantage of that strength. We're also aware that most students come to us with a very different experience of responding to texts, or more likely having their texts responded *to*. Most of them have been taught that writing is about products and responding is evaluating whether those products are good or bad. We want to help students see beyond this, to see writing as a process, drafts as a possibility, and response as an invitation to revision. So, we need to be careful about starting with lenses that deal closely with what's on the page (2-Step Summary) because those lenses tend to reinforce the students' ideas of writing as a product, and this can make it very hard to ask them then to back away from the text and to do a lens like Reply. That's why we see the order of the lenses in this booklet as a progression from gathering context and discussing ideas, moving toward choices and organization in a particular text. And in deciding which lens to use on a draft, the next lens in that progression is a good choice.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the different lenses make different features of texts more visible—development, claims, organization, voice—so **we want students to experience as many of the lenses as possible**. Which means, we'll tend to choose lenses based on which ones students haven't learned yet and not necessarily on what a particular draft "needs." Again, this isn't absolute. You may have a strong urge to use, let's say, Overall to help you as a reader understand a particular draft, and as long as you're careful about the issues mentioned above, it should be fine. But, in general we'll try to work through the lenses in the book, introducing and practicing them all by the end of a semester. Our goal is to get to a place where readers and a writer negotiate which lens to use on a draft, but we realize students need to try all the lenses before they can even make that kind of choice.

And it's okay to learn the lenses in the order in this booklet, without too much worry about which one would fit best a particular draft, because **all the lenses help readers look more closely at a text**. Even in the worst case, doing a lens will still give you a better sense of what lens would have worked better, and you *can* apply it next. That said, the lenses *do* differ and will probably be of benefit for different kinds of writing or, especially, texts at different stages in the writing process. Lenses that can create a discussion about content and ask for amplification (Reply, Center-of-Gravity, More About), for example, may fit better for earlier drafts; responses that look at the organization of ideas, for later drafts (2-Step Summary, Where & Why). So, once we've learned all the lenses, we'll keep this in mind when choosing how to respond to a draft.

Using a Lens

While the lenses are based how we respond to each other in our day-to-day conversation, using them on writing is new to students. So, **introducing a lens is very important**. We need to take our time and pay attention to *what* we're doing, not just what we're doing it *to*. The first time you do a lens, make sure you go through the whole lens page: Name the lens, read how to ask for response, how to give it, and what it's like. After reading the whole description, read again the *question* the lens asks. And even then, we'll probably need to use some lenses multiple times to get the hang of them.

Also, we want to **make sure students are actually responding by using the lenses**. The way most people are used to responding to texts is a binary liking or disliking, followed by directives for revision. It's really easy for people to fall back into that kind of response if we don't insist they try the response of the lens we're doing. If someone does go off lens, we'll define the kind of response they are giving, "*Ah, you're telling us whether you like it*", and then remind them of the kind of response we're all trying to give, "*but we're only writing what we want to hear More About right now.*"

It's essential to give lens responses in writing, rather than just saying them. Writing and then reading that same feedback aloud prevents one person from dominating the conversation and ensures that all members of the group have an opportunity to gather their thoughts, formulate their responses, and share them equally. Also, sharing impromptu writing like this teaches students to have faith in their own ability to use writing as a means of exploring and communicating ideas.

It's best if you can assemble a group to give these responses. What better way to find out what an audience might think of a text than sharing it with a small group of readers, hearing them respond, and having a discussion with them? Hearing several readers asking the same questions of a text you all just read can give the writer a sense of what having an "audience" can mean. And not just for the writer. Responding in groups also reinforces the idea that *readers* have their own thoughts and expertise to bring to a conversation, and, in fact, the idea that writing is about being a part of an academic conversation, not just a solo performance.

Because we want students to get that sense of audience in our groups **it's important that we all respond to the same text using the same lens** because different lenses bring different features into focus. If we are all using the same lens, when we share our responses, we're all taking part in the same conversation.

The experience of our kind of responding is new in several ways to most students, so **it's important to reflect on the experience after responding.** What was it like to respond this way? What did this particular lens show you? When might you want this kind of response on your own writing?

After Doing a Lens

What do you do after responses are all read back? We hope discussion about the responses will come naturally and easily, and opportunities to explore new questions in writing will also arise naturally from that discussion.

If discussion doesn't come easily, though, one thing you can do is **ask students if they noticed any similarities** about their responses. They may notice **patterns, or categories of response.** If students aren't able to do it, you can help: *"Ah, you two wrote about celebrity deaths and we both mentioned betrayal by friends."* After doing that and talking a bit, **look for something else you can write about**: *"So, which interests you all more right now: this idea of betrayal or celebrity deaths? Ok, let's write about that, then: What celebrity's death had a big impact on you?"*

If there's no obvious way to take the discussion back to writing, put it to the group:

What could we write about right now? Let's all write two possible questions we could explore in writing right now, and then we'll share them.

Have tutees read their draft live-write questions one-by-one and help re-shape them so the questions are open-ended, specific, and meaningful to the students. Then decide together on one question to write about and share.

If you're teaching a lens for the first time, make sure to leave time at the end of the writing and discussion to take time to reflect on using the lens:

What was it like giving this kind of response?

This is useful early on to highlight how the kind of responding we do at the Writing Center is different from the way students have responded to texts before. It can also help them draw distinctions between the different lenses.

One question that is always good to end a session on is to ask a writer:

Do you have something you could work on now?

If they say "no," you can spend a little more time writing as a group about how the responses the group gave might lead to choices for the writer.

Center-of-Gravity

After reading this, what really sticks in your mind?

One center of gravity for me is …

_____

A Center-of-gravity is simply what sticks in your mind after reading a text. It could be something new and interesting to you as a reader or a pattern that you notice running throughout a draft. These don't have to be main points. Doing Centers-of-gravity is a great way to start a conversation about a text, but it can also be helpful to a writer letting them know what an audience notices most, whether that happens because something is interesting, distracting, or moving. What a writer does with that information may vary. It might just feel good that people are hearing what you said, or it might show you something you didn't even realize was in your draft and that you want to emphasize now.

When you write a center-of-gravity for a draft, first, read the whole thing, then put it aside and, thinking back over it, make note of the one or two things that stick in your mind most.

It's Like:

Center-of-gravity is a lot like what we do after we watch a movie as we're walking out with friends or family. Don't we usually talk about the moments that, for whatever reason, still stick in mind after the whole 2 hours of the movie is over? Maybe what springs to mind is a particularly bad actor, a cool digital effect, or a romantic tension that ran through the whole film. And these can lead to a conversation about the movie as a whole.

Example:

"I think one center of gravity for me is the idea of worry. You say before you never really worried about anything, but when you saw the university syllabus you didn't know if you could do all the work—you worried. I wonder if this means college was challenging you in positive ways. Is it okay to worry? Or, maybe you should have been better informed about what to expect?"

Tutor Notes on Center-of-Gravity

The Writer Can:

Do the lens

Watch out for:

Background & Theory

This response first appeared in Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers*.

If you teach in traditionally sized class, center-of-gravity is a really effective way to have a class discussion about any text. Have students get in small groups, write their "centers," share what they wrote in their groups and discuss; then ask each group to provide one thing that stood out for them as you put their responses on the board. You can add anything important that hasn't come up, and then continue the discussion as a whole-class conversation.

The conversations in the small groups before the whole class discussion allow students to feel more comfortable asking questions and even allows those inevitable students who didn't read at least to get an idea of what the text is about, so they can better follow the class discussion and understand assignments or activities that will build on it.

Reply

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When you ask for Reply you're really inviting readers to enter into a conversation with you about your *topic*. Many times what's most helpful from an audience isn't whether they think our draft is good or bad, but whether their experiences with the topic are different from ours and in what ways.

To give a writer a Reply, first, read the whole draft, then, putting it aside, simply say what comes to your mind in response to what you've heard. A Reply might be a personal experience or memory you have, but it might just be something you've read or heard about. Sometimes it may be directly related to what the author said but other times it won't.

It's Like:

Reply is a lot like what you do when your friend tells you they just found a little mom-and-pop taco stand and how good the food was. That makes you think about a little hamburger stand in your home town, and you tell them about it and how good the cheeseburgers were. What you share is relevant and comes from your own experience, even though it isn't about the shop your friend mentioned or even the same kind of food.

Example:

A Reply to an essay about the death of Selena, a famous female singer:

"This makes me think of Mac Miller. He was a young artist at the top of his popularity, and I remember being shocked at the news of his death. It was totally unexpected. And I did have all of his albums. Now there would be no more songs, no more albums. It's odd to be so moved or affected by the death of someone who is basically a stranger, someone who didn't even know you."

Tutor Notes on Reply

The Writer Can:
After sharing this, I also think of …

Watch out for:
People noticing, for example, errors in the text, instead of replying to the *content*.

Background & Theory
Reply assumes not just writers but readers too have expertise to bring to conversations. It puts aside the writer's text for a while, so readers can take a moment to take stock of that expertise and have a conversation about the topic. Even if our replies don't offer a clear direction for revision, they are a powerful way for a writer to get a better sense of audience. Not only are people paying attention to what you have written, they also have experiences and ideas of their own.

By using the readers' personal replies, you are better able to get at the general, the abstracted ideas that show up in a text.

Reply is actually a good response to use for poems because the subjects are often emotional and personal, and getting a sense of the audience's experiences, rather than how they judge your poem, is a respectful way to start a discussion.

More About

   Doing More About for a draft lets the writer know what questions you have and what you're curious about. It's good for writers to know what readers want to know because often what we want to know are the things that will help us be convinced and satisfied. But just because you want to know more about something doesn't mean the writer has to put it in their draft. They still have to make decisions about which things are most important.

   To give a writer More About, read the whole draft first. Afterwards, just write down whatever it is you want to know more about. It's also useful to write a sentence or two to explain *why* you want to hear more about those things.

It's Like:

   More about is a lot like when your friend is telling you about a fender bender they saw on the way to school. You might ask *"Is that the intersection by the Wendy's?"* because you're curious. Where it happened might not matter at all as far as your friend is concerned, but it's okay for you to be curious about it.

Example:

   "I want to know more about how the foster system works. When do kids enter?
        Just as infants?
   I want to know more about where kids that age out live. Do they have to get
        their own apartment? How do they make money? Are they on their own or
        still assisted in some way?
   I want to know more about how, you think, we might help the young people
        aging out.
   I want to know more about if there are different challenges in aging out in different
        areas. I mean, do young people have it easier aging out in, say, Ventura than
        Oakland?"

Tutor Notes on More About

The Writer Can:

I could write more about …

Watch out for:

"I want to know more about your thesis." More About should be about things you are interested in as a reader, not veiled advice based on some criterion you have in mind, like *all essays need a thesis*. By asking about a thesis, he responder is probably not getting a sense of the purpose of the text overall. The lens that would work better for addressing that issue would be Overall.

Background & Theory

Amplification, adding to a text, is the easiest kind of change for learning writers to make, probably because it's the simplest of all revision—once you decide where, just add a few sentences answering the reader's questions. Because of this, when asked what kind of response they would like, student writers will often *only* ask for More About; that's why we, as readers, may need to reserve the right to respond with a different lens. If we are more puzzled about what an essay is even about, giving a More About response might help, but an Overall would be a more straightforward way to start a conversation about that.

Overall

Writer:

    What do you hear me saying overall?

Responder:

    Are you saying overall that …?

_____

With Overall, we're asking what readers think the point of our whole text is. Sometimes it's not easy to know *ourselves* what we want to say overall with our writing. For example, if you're writing about the purpose of getting an education you might want to say "It's to help get a job," or "It's to get a well-paying job," or "It's to get a job you enjoy doing." These start out close to each other, but can go in very different directions. And sometimes you may start off thinking that you want to say one thing and realize through writing and discussion with your readers that you really want to say something else with your writing.

Overall is also helpful for readers in trying to understand a text they are reading for the first time. Your text might be clear, but about a complicated topic, and using the Overall lens can help us understand what you are trying to say.

To give a writer an Overall for their draft read the whole text, then try to sum up in a sentence what you feel the writer is "getting at." Feel free to try this with several "draft" sentences. Write your response in a mildly questioning tone that invites the writer to respond. Think of yourself as inviting the writer to restate and get closer to what they want to say.

It's Like:

Overall is like what we do sometimes after we hear a friend tell us a long story about a bad concert experience. We might ask, "*Are you saying that it was worse than you expected, or that you'll never go again? Or that they are not just a good band to see live?*"

Example:

"Are you saying overall that injustice is usually about the majority oppressing the minority? or,

Are you saying overall that justice can't be revenge, and that usually laws are about revenge?

Are you saying overall that injustice is when a government *says* it grants people rights but doesn't actually live up to what they say?"

Tutor Notes on Overall

The Writer Can:

I think I'm saying overall …

Watch out for:

Just listing back smaller claims of the draft or responding paragraph by paragraph. Overall should be about what the whole text is saying *overall*, on the whole—what overall claim it's trying to make. Use Skeleton Feedback to look at individual claims.

Background & Theory

We derived this lens from "Sayback" used by Sondra Perl and Elaine Avidon of the New York City Writing Project. We first had to modified the lens because we noticed students, when asked to "say back" what the draft was saying, would make lists of topics or claims in the paper, rather than trying to get at the crux of what the writer seemed to be trying to say. We finally also changed the name of the response to Overall to make the question the lens was asking even more clear.

Play-by-Play

Writer:

What reactions do you have as you read through my paper?

Responder:

I'm feeling … because …

_____

With a Play-by-play we do our best to record our raw reactions as a reader *as* we read a draft. These reactions are the basis of all other responses.

To give a writer a Play-by-play: pause after reading each paragraph and write the story of how that paragraph made you feel or react. Use "I" statements. Also, predict what might happen and check on your predictions every now and then.

It's Like:

Play-by-play got its name because it's a lot like what a sports commentator does when they relay what's happening on the field and their reaction to it: *"Wow, they're going to throw a pass instead of punt. I'm really surprised, but if this works I predict they'll throw again and they might be able to turn this game around."*

It's also a lot like "live tweeting." If you've ever seen someone tweeting during a political debate or new electronics launch, and they are commenting and predicting as the event unfolds, they are giving their Play-by-play.

Example:

"I'm hesitant to agree with you that we're a classless and hindrance-less society— I'm hoping you return to that point in more detail. I'm unsure who has told me to put down others to boost my own self-esteem. Again, I'm not agreeing with you and hope you explain this more. I'm curious too what forms of success you mean and I'm interested in your opinion on how our advancing society has or has not changed the ideal of success. Is success now different than 50 years ago? I want you to explain. I'm not trusting your voice yet because I'm hesitant to agree with the points you bring up, but I'm interested in how you will back up this introduction."

Tutor Notes on Play-by-Play

1. Live-write: **"As a reader sometimes, when I'm reading, I feel like …"**

2. Share and place communally on a sheet of paper.

3. Read the first paragraph aloud.

4. Write Play-by-Play for that paragraph & share. (Note: Don't stop and discuss, unless you have to Define and Remind, just move on to the next paragraph)

5. Repeat 3-4 until you finish the essay.

6. Live-write: **"What were some places we all had similar reactions?"**

7. Share and discuss.

8. Post Response question: **"What did doing Play-by-Play show you about this text?"**

It's okay if you need more than one session to complete a play-by-play. You can pick up where you left off. Just have everyone start the next session by reading through their previous responses to have them fresh in mind.

Possible Reader Reactions:

Lost	Curious	Surprised	Amused	Persuaded	Doubtful
Content	Confused	Resistant	Impatient	Bored	Put Off
Pleased	Trusting	Interested	Questioning	Hesitant	Agreeing

The Writer Can:

Do the lens. The author's responses will be from a slightly different angle, for example *"I'm worried that I come across as angry here?"* but still a Play-by-Play.

Watch out for:

"You should …"   *"You need …"*   *"I want …"*

Also watch out for fake feelings which are really traditional evaluations of a text or its parts framed as if they are a feeling. *"I feel like it's lacking an argument"* should really be something like: *"I'm feeling unconvinced because…."* Also, be careful when using a sample essay because people may say derogatory things they wouldn't say if the writer were there. If this is a problem, you can do a live-write: **"What would you have said differently if the writer were here?"**

Background & Theory

This was Peter Elbow's Movies of the Reader's Mind that appeared in his *Writing Without Teachers*. We noticed some students would be confused by the movie metaphor; they would think they were supposed to describe scenes or images from essays as if they were appearing in a movie. We finally changed the name of the lens to Play-by-Play to try to avoid that confusion.

Audience

Who do you imagine I'm writing this to?

I imagine you writing to …

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Who you're talking to about something will probably change *how* you talk to them and what you say. With Audience we're trying to see if the draft is written for a particular group of people, and who that is? What we can also do is come up with a clear idea of who the writer *wants* to write to and how they might write better to that audience.

To do Audience first read the whole draft and then write who you think the author is writing to and what things led you to think that.

It's Like:

Audience is a lot like how you talk differently about a band you really like with a friend who likes them too, with a friend who's never heard of them, and with your grandpa (if it ever even comes up). With the fellow fan you expect them to know a lot of things you know, like the names of the people in the band, the albums, the names of songs. With the other friend you might have to fill them in on a lot of that. With grandpa you might have to explain why your band isn't just "noise."

Example:

"I imagine you writing to an audience that is only minimally aware of modern farmers. I imagine these people don't personally know any farmers, and, like you said, only think of farmers as being hokey, overall-wearing, hay slingers. I imagine this audience is young too, given the casual sound and tone of the paper."

Tutor Notes on Audience

1. Read the lens description in the group
2. Read the entire draft
3. Write: "I imagine the audience for this to be . . ."
4. Share/ discuss
5. On a communal piece of paper, come up with multiple, potential audiences
6. Pick one and write, "What do you think they would care most about?"
7. Share/ discuss
8. Repeat for one (or two) other audiences

The Writer Can:
Do the lens

Watch out for:

Background & Theory
This response lens was our own creation.

While many of our lenses are about making group members as audience more apparent, the writer's intended audience, or first imagined audience, or even potential audience might be very different from their group mates. The Audience lens allows us to think about these other possible audiences and maybe make revision choices regarding the material to include, the tone, and overall strategy to address that audience.

Two-Step Summary

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Two-Step Summary looks at what things a paragraph of a draft *talks* about and then zooms out a little bit to see what it is *saying* about those things. This can be helpful to do on a draft with really big or complicated paragraphs. But, because it will give us a clear idea of what all the paragraphs are saying, Two-Step Summary is also a good way to get a sense of the order of ideas in a draft.

To give a writer Two-Step Summary, first just list the things that are talked about in a paragraph. After that, write a sentence in your own words that sums up what the paragraph is saying about those things. Repeat this for each paragraph.

It's Like:

Two-Step Summary is a lot like if you're helping a friend unpack boxes after a move. Your friend asks, *"What's in that one?"* You might say, *"It's got silverware, some cups, a vase, and other stuff."* And then, *"I think it must be a kitchen box."* So, first you take a look inside to see what the box contains, and then you categorize the box.

Example:

"**Paragraph 1**

Things it Talks About: teachers, teacher pay, school, children

What it Says about those things: Teachers are an essential part of our kids' lives so we need to pay them well.

Paragraph 2

Things: parents, school, education, parents' jobs

What it says about those things: It's good for parents to be involved with their kids schooling, but they are busy and tired from just trying to make a living."

Tutor Notes on Two-Step Summary

Note: because introductions and conclusions are often summaries themselves, it's ok to skip them if they are too difficult to do 2-step on. You can come back to them at the end of the process.

1. Read aloud one paragraph.
2. Write individually, **"What things are in this paragraph?"** These can just be lists of nouns or noun phrases, but they should be things *in* the text and not implied.
3. Rotate around the table sharing one thing at a time from your lists, marking off what others have already said.
4. Write individually, in a sentence, in your own words: **"What does the paragraph say about those things?"**
5. Share.
6. You may want to ask, **"What did you leave out?"** especially if responders are ignoring whole parts of a paragraph. Or, you may need to say, **"Show me where that is in the paragraph"** if they seem to be inventing things that aren't there.
7. Repeat for each paragraph.

The Writer Can:
Do the lens

Watch out for:
Responders projecting ideas they know about a topic but that aren't actually in the text. A complicated paragraph about institutional racism might yield a Says sentence like: *"Racism is bad and we shouldn't be racist,"* because the reader is familiar with those ideas, notices the topic and plugs in what they know, rather than what that paragraph is actually saying. These are called commonplace narratives.

Background & Theory
This response was developed when we broke up Kenneth Bruffee's Descriptive Outline, which looked at what each paragraph *Says* and *Does*. We found that students would rarely could get to the *Does*, i.e., recognize the rhetorical function of a paragraph because they were struggling so much with identifying what paragraphs were actually saying. We found that summary is often more complicated and difficult than people assume. So, we broke that first summary step into two steps.

Conversation Map

How do you see the conversation between me and my sources?

Responder:

I imagine the conversation like this…

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Writing is often presenting what various people are saying about an issue and how their claims and statements relate to one another. This can get complicated if there are lots of voices or if the people disagree in small ways. One way to help us understand these conversations within drafts is to map them out, actually draw out the relationships on paper. Who is speaking first? Who are the various speakers responding to? Another thing we can do to help us understand the relationships between what all the speakers are saying is to imagine them together in the same place talking to each other. What if all the sources quoted in a draft were sitting in a coffee shop talking to each other? What would they say to each other?

To do a Conversation Map first read the whole draft and then establish who the speakers are in this particular conversation and write their names on a piece of paper. Figure out what things each speaker is talking about, what each speaker seems to be saying overall. Then try to draw connections between them on the paper. To see how the speakers' ideas are related to each other, you can also imagine the speakers having a conversation in a coffee shop, and write out a script of what they would say to each other.

It's Like:

The script we write is how we imagine the conversation to go.

Example:

Here's a script of an imagined conversation between the sources for a paper titled "The Myth of the American Family":

Gary Soto: Yeah, I remember talking to my sister about how I wanted our family to be   more like the one on *Leave it to Beaver*.

Stephanie Coontz: I think many people wanted that since they wanted to escape reality.

Gary Soto: Well, that's because a lot of us wanted to achieve the wealth shown on those sitcoms.

Writer: But the reality was that people at the time were just trying to keep their lives together after the war.

Tutor Notes on Conversation Map

Note: There are three stages to this lens: establish who the **voices** are and what they are saying; **map** out relationships between those voices; and imagine a **script** of what those people would say to each other if they met in a coffee shop.

1. Take turns reading the draft aloud.
2. Take turns adding the speakers in this conversation to a communal list.
3. If there are a lot of voices negotiate which are more important.
4. **Voices**: Pick one of those important voices and do two-step summary on it. (You can write notes on the communal paper.)
5. Repeat step 4 for each of the more important voices from your list. Don't get bogged down. Once you have a sense of what they're saying, move on to:
6. **Map:** Use lines or symbols to draw relationships between these speakers on a communal piece of paper. You can use different highlighter colors to indicate the following (make a key for what the colors mean):

Who's talking to whom?	How are they talking to each other?
Who's asking questions?	Who's loudest?
Who's saying yes, and…?	Who speaks most?
Who's saying yes, but…?	Who's angry?
Who's saying no, but…?	Who's more formal?
Who has evidence?	Who do you want to hear more from?

7. **Script:** Finally, imagine the sources in the draft sitting in a coffee shop talking. Write out a dialogue of specific things they say to each other like the script for a movie or a play.
8. Share your scripts.
9. Ask: "What stood out about our scripts?"

Note: If one voice is hard to pin down for the group you could have everyone highlight where it appears in the text before doing the rest of the steps.

Watch out for:

This lens is not meant to just map out the conversation as it happens in the draft in front of you, but to map it as of it was happening out in the world, live.

Background & Theory

We developed this response lens after seeing students bring in drafts that summarized scholarly articles without talking about how they related to each other at all.

Skeleton Feedback

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Skeleton Feedback is a way of looking at the claims a draft is making, and deciding which evidence and examples are meant to support those claims. One claim may span several paragraphs and evidence for a claim might be located at several places in a draft.

To give Skeleton Feedback, read the whole draft first, then list the claims as they come to you in any order. Don't worry about which is the most important or which comes first in the paper. Just try to get all the big claims. Then, pick one of those claims and go back through the draft to find examples and evidence the writer is using to try to support that claim. Repeat this for all the claims.

It's Like:

It's like when a friend is telling you why they hate your other friend. They have been talking for 15 minutes telling you a bunch of reasons and examples in a jumble. Finally, you have to stop them, *"Wait, you're saying you don't like him because you don't trust him, but the three things you mentioned weren't his fault. And you say he was disrespectful to you but don't have any examples of when he was."*

Example:

Here are some of the claims a group came up with together for a draft about the use of the word "basic" in social media and pop culture:

> A basic woman is a predictable millennial woman.
>
> Basic is a term appropriated from black culture by white people.
>
> Basic-ness may be inevitable based on where you live.
>
> Basic is used against a particular type of woman.
>
> Basic is a stereotype.
>
> Using basic is a form of misogyny.
>
> Avoiding basic-ness is an upper-class privilege.
>
> People who make fun of basic-ness show a fear of conformity.

Tutor Notes on Skeleton Feedback

Go Slow. We aren't just trying to get through the lens to find a revision task; we're actually reading closely and learning about the text and topic each step of doing the lens.

1. Writer gets the file to everyone (via channel, shared drive, etc). Everyone opens that file in Word on their computer.
2. Type a read order in chat. Take turns reading paragraphs based on that order. Read the whole text.
3. Go to your paper notebooks, everyone, individually, write a list of the claims you remember as they come to you— they don't need to be in order of importance or appearance.
4. Tutor makes a whiteboard. Ask each tutee to share one claim, say it out loud and add it to that whiteboard.
5. Now, have each person nominate a claim that seems bigger or more important. When deciding, you'll probably discuss which claims are actually just sub-claims of others, or which sound so similar you can combine them together. Don't get bogged down, though.
6. Choose one of those claims to start with.
7. Everyone go back to your individual word documents and look through the text for anything having to do with that same claim and highlight them in a chosen color.
8. After you're finished, have one student share screen and show one page of highlights they made on their word doc. You don't have to report line-by-line; just comparing hunks of color can show similarities, or differences. For the next page, have the next tutee share screen and show highlights. Continue until you've shared all pages.
9. Repeat this for 2-3 other big claims in the text.
10. Live-write: "What places were hard to decide when highlighting?" Sometimes, you may want to do this Live-write as well: "What about these places where there's no highlighting? What are they doing?"
11. Live-write: "What do you realize about this draft now, after all of our responses and discussion?" Share and discuss.

The Writer Can:

Do the lens with us.

Watch out for:

You may feel you need to discuss "claims" or "evidence," but don't get bogged down defining those terms. Most students understand what a claim is. If somebody is struggling, just use a simple definition, like: *"A claim is a statement someone makes that others could disagree*

with." If you do feel you need to talk about evidence, don't do it in abstract terms, do a live-write, like *"What evidence would be convincing to you?"*

Background & Theory

While there is a lens in *Sharing and Responding* called Skeleton Feedback, it is very different from ours. It consists of six different questions that touch on everything from the main point, to claims, to suggestions. With our version we got rid of the requirement to determine a main point which can be a difficult task on its own, and better served by the Overall lens. We've also removed a lot of the other questions and focused on claims in general. This allows us to have two tools that take stock of the content of texts: one from the angle of what paragraphs contain (2-Step Summary), and the other ignoring paragraph boundaries and locating evidence across a text (Skeleton Feedback).

Voice

What kind of voice, or voices, do you hear in this writing?

I hear your voice as …

_____

When you tell an author how their Voice sounds in a draft, you're giving them that immediate reaction we often have to a text because of the way the writer is coming off to us. The Voice of a writer might seem angry, condescending, hopeful or sympathetic. Finding out how readers are hearing your voice in a draft can be really useful, you may want to revise in order to sound more reliable or sympathetic. You may want to adjust things so you don't sound too frustrated or angry, it depends. And, keep in mind, that Voice can change throughout a draft, perhaps starting hesitant and becoming confident.

To give a writer Voice, read their whole draft and then write how they sound to you, including how their voice changes throughout the draft.

It's Like:
Voice is not necessarily someone sounding different, squeaky or fast, but the sense you get from what they're saying. When your friend is apologizing about breaking something he borrowed—*"Sorry I broke your backpack, that brand is really cheap, and I barely put any weight in it when we went camping. You should just buy a better one."*—and you get a sense that he doesn't really feel sorry or responsible, you're paying attention to Voice.

Example:
"I hear your voice as dreamy, kind of romantic, at first. I imagine a soft voice, almost like a therapist or a hypnotist. But then it seems to escalate into something a little more aggressive. At first this kind of sounds like you're trying to be honest with us, especially when you start talking about competition and how everyone is out to win. But as you go on it turns from honesty into arrogance. You seem to be aware of this though, as you question your own conceited tone in the third paragraph. The last two paragraphs, however, sound angry, hateful, even sociopathic, almost as though you're the only person in the world that really matters."

Tutor Notes on Voice

1. Take turns reading the lens description page.
2. Live-write: **"In my writing I want to sound…"**
3. Share, discuss, and place traits communally on a sheet of paper.
4. Pick one of these voices and live-write: **"How do you make a text sound _____?"**
5. Share and discuss.
6. Read the whole draft aloud.
7. Write your response: **"I hear your voice(s) as…"**
8. Share and discuss.
9. Look back at the text to try and pinpoint where exactly responders started noticing/feeling the voice(s).
10. Post Response question: **"What was it like to give this kind of feedback?"**

The Writer Can:

In this writing I want to sound …

Watch out for:

Background & Theory

This lens appeared in Sharing and Responding.

How to Get Started with a Prompt

Gather context from the student about this prompt—
What class is this from? When did you get it? When is it due?

Taking turns, **read the prompt aloud**.

Now ask, "What things will they have to do?" and **use the whiteboard in Zoom to communally make a list of tasks** (if you have trouble sifting the tasks from a long, complicated prompt try highlighting verbs). Have students verbally say what they are adding as they type their task on the whiteboard.

Don't worry about listing every possible task; just get the bulk of them.

Now, **use the draw tool to make 3 simple sections** and,

Ask each tutee in turn, about where a task can be placed in the "baskets." You can get started more easily sometimes by saying *"What do we not need to worry about right now?"* or *"What is a task we will have to do early on?"* You can speed this part up by using your select tool to just drag the existing tasks across the whiteboard for the student. Continue doing this to, roughly, **place the tasks** in order that they will probably need to be worried about:

Early | Later | Laaaaater
               | |
               | |

Again, don't worry about placing every task from your communal list; just get most placed. This isn't a scientific timeline meant to bind the writer to these exact tasks, but a way to sift through a lot of information and find a place to start.

Now, **just get a toe-hold** to get started, pick something the whole group can explore, and do either:

> **Mindmap**   or   **Focused live-write**
> then
> focused live-write

Some typically good places to get started are, defining an important term (like community), choosing one of several texts to write about, choosing a topic or issue.

Tricky Prompts

What if the Prompt is about something no one has read yet?

   If a student has a prompt that is asking them to write about a book that none of the rest of the group has read (sometimes even the student with the assignment hasn't read the book), live-writing can be a good way to start a conversation about the topic. This is a lot like taking stock for a reading. What do we know about this topic? What would we want to know? Even in trickier situations like a book review for a book that you don't have in front of you, the group can write about what you all know about book reviews. For example, once a student had a prompt to write a book review for a history class and hadn't read the book yet. But she had decided she wanted to read a biography on Lincoln. So, we live-wrote, "W*hat makes a good biography for you?"* And some interesting ideas that came up were: does a biography need to be in chronological order?, and, would this book include a discussion of what it thought were crucial events in Lincoln's life that may have shaped who he was?

Helping Students with Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical analysis is an academic term for looking closely at a text—not so much *what it says* but *how it works*. What is the writer/text trying to do: who wrote it, to whom, how and why? If you're dealing with an assignment that asks for rhetorical analysis, try breaking it down into these steps that are more familiar:

Example: A student has to do a rhetorical analysis of an article about GMOs.

You need to start with: **Who is the writer?**

This is like the scanning we do when we use our reading strategies on a text. What do we know about this person or company who made this text? What can we find out about the writer from the clues in the text, or where and when it was published?

ex: We looked on the article and searched the web to determine the author was a researcher working with food genetics in Switzerland.

Live-write: **What do you know about this topic?**

What is the bigger context around this topic? For example, what has been in the news, what are people arguing about, who's talking about this, etc.

ex: We figured out that there has been an ongoing controversy about genetically modified foods since the first one commercially available the Flavr Savr tomato. Consumers have been afraid of them and worry they aren't safe.

Live-Write: **Who do you imagine the writer's audience to be?**

ex: It seems like the writer is addressing those worried people, at least the ones that might read a science article like this.

Live-Write: **What is the writer trying to do to that audience? And why?**

ex: He seems to be trying to reassure them that genetically modified foods are safe to buy and eat largely through presenting a survey of many studies that have determined them safe over the years.

Live-Write: **How is the writer trying to do that?**

This depends on the audience and what the writer is trying to do, but some tools a writer might use are humor, heartbreaking stories, scientific data, statements from experts in a field, personal experience.

ex: One "move" here might be using science and the accumulation of multiple studies showing the same results to reassure the audience with the certainty of those results.

Live-Write: **How successful do you think they are/will be with that?**

ex: This might vary from reader to reader. Is that appeal to science and authority reassuring to the kind of person who would be reading a science-based article? Probably.

Generating

Quicklisting

Quicklisting is a way to generate by tapping into associative thinking. This means, not logical connections between things or ideas, but the leaps our brains can make. If I say "apple," you might think of the fruit, the computer company, or your grandma cooking pies. Because of this, Quicklisting tends to be strong for personal topics.

Also because of this, it is important not to edit your thoughts as you make your quicklist. It is also important to not worry that someone might see your list. So, **we never share our quicklists**. This gives us the freedom to write goofy and embarrassing things. Some pointers:

Have a clear question to list about.
Only list for 30 seconds or less.

Look for patterns in what you've listed to generate more lists.
Ask students if they see patterns in their results.

Think of times: past/present/future.
Think of opposites.

Once you have a bunch of quicklists done pick something that surprises or interests you and write a little explaining it. Then everyone can share that writing with the group.

Mindmapping

There are many ways to generate visually and they are called a lot of things. You may have used clustering or bubbles before, but we'll call this Mindmapping.

Mindmapping is about generating by looking for logical relationships between things. Because of this, it is strong in generating about relationships between us and society, between organizations, communities, and hierarchies.

Start communally, every person can write their own bubbled idea on the same page. Once a bubble is on the page try to push more ideas off of it. After a bit, pause and try to see if there are any patterns or relationships between the ideas we have so far. Our goal is to then use that knowledge to put even more bubbles down.

Live-writing

We gave the kind of writing we do a new name because it is a kind of writing most people don't do. Live-writing is when you are given a question, write to explore and answer it, and then immediately share what you wrote with other people.

What to Live-write

Here are some qualities important for fruitful live-writes:

Focused   **Ask it as one clear question**. If you say *Let's write about writing in your past—maybe how it affected who you are as a student, or what your relationship to writing has been, whether you've hated or loved it.* Each amendment asks a new question and makes the task I have as a writer more vague. If I'm not completely confused, I'll just focus myself on the last thing you say.

Open   **Phrase it as an open-ended question**. Who, What, When, Where, Why, How—are good ways to start. Don't start with *do*, or *are*, or *was*, for example: *Do you like writing?* or *Are you a confident writer?* Such yes/no questions really limit the ways I can respond. Do you want me to just write *No*?

Real   **Explore something you don't know**. Beware of setting a live-write up as a venue to demonstrate your expertise. If you are going to be writing about a topic you are knowledgeable and/or opinionated about, try to find a question that you really are unsure of. Live-writing is meant to be an exploration, not just a new formulation of a canned response.

Personal   **Make it about me**. I don't think all our live-writes need to be personal; in fact, sometimes it would be better to avoid that, but it's an easy way to make them both specific and relevant. This is probably related to being focused and real. Don't ask me *Why is writing important?* or *How do people write?*; ask me *Where do you write?* or *What kind of writing do you do?*

Inclusive **Everyone in the group needs to be able to write**. This might seem to contradict the "personal" quality, but it doesn't have to. We want to try to find a topic that we are familiar with and that doesn't exclude anyone in the group. For example, if a draft brings up the topic of religion, you might think first to write: *What are your religious beliefs?* While it's true that is specific and personal,   not everyone in the group may have religious beliefs or want to make them public. An alternative could be *What were your experiences with organized religion growing up?"* This   would allow people to write about being invited to church activities, temples or mosques in their neighborhood, or even programs they saw on TV.

Important **The question should matter**. We have to be careful not to make what we ask students to write about seem trivial. And, more than that, if our live-writes are us having conversations about these topics, what are the big questions, the fundamental questions for this topic. For example, on the topic of guns, a tutor might set the live-write question as *What would you do with a gun if you had one?* A more fundamental and productive question for this topic would be *Who should be allowed to own a gun?*

When to Live-write

Some places to write are built into our small writing group processes—after prompts, after sharing and discussing responses—but what about other times when we're just having a verbal conversation, what are good times to stop everything and go back to writing? Watch for:

A student asks about writing

Instead of feeling the need to be an expert on anything students might ask, **when someone asks a question turn it into an opportunity for the whole group to explore in writing**. You may have to reshape the question a bit, but if one person asks a question there's a pretty good chance that others may be wondering about the same thing. And even something that seems trivial at first *"How long should a college essay be?"* might lead to a really fruitful discussion in writing.

A student asks about revision choices

If a student what they should do with their draft after hearing the group's response, a live-write can be a good way to help translate the response into writer choices. Have the group write about the response, for example: *Which of all our More About questions seemed the most important?* or *Which places did we all respond in similar ways in our Play-by-plays?* And then talk about what they could do as a writer after hearing that: *Could you answer that question in your next draft? What could you do to help the reader be less confused when they hit paragraph 3 and 4?*

Something interesting arises in discussion

Certain phrases can signal a good point to stop and explore something in writing: *I wonder why that is?, Has that ever happened to you?*

Surveying a Text

If you're invited to a party you probably pay attention to certain things to give you an idea of what to expect when you get there. Have you been to one of this person's parties before? Did they ask you to bring food? What time of day will it be? Do you know anyone else that's going?

That's pretty much what you do when you Survey, or scan a text. It's quickly looking over, around, and through a text to get an idea of what to expect from it. There are many things that might be worth noticing. It would be impossible to list them all and really depends on the text you're looking at. But there are some pretty straightforward questions you can ask to help get you started.

Who

Who wrote this? Is there any biographical information about the author before or after the text? Have they written other things?

What

What kind of text is this? Is it a textbook, a novel, a scientific article? How long is it, one page, ten? But also, **what** parts does this text have-- is there a table of contents, an index, pictures, headings? Keep an eye out for different kinds of font here; a different font probably means a different part.

When

When was this text written, the 1930s, the 1980s, last week?

Where

This could mean where was the piece written-- is the author from the south, from New York City? It could also mean where did this text originally appear, was it an article in a newspaper? Which one? Was it a chapter from a book? Which one?

Why

Why do you think the author wrote this? Why do you think you are being asked to read it?

Taking Stock of a Text

Imagine I said we were going on a trip next week. I'm guessing the first thing you'd want to know is *"Where to?"* Because, if I said Vegas, or Disney World, you would probably have different expectations about what a trip to each would be like and different questions about how to prepare for each.

When you take stock, you take a moment to check what you know about a subject, either from your personal experience or from reading or hearing about it somewhere.

So, if I said Las Vegas, you might think of casinos, hot desert environment and late nights. If I said Disney World you might think of amusement park rides, waiting in lines, and flying to Florida.

Experienced readers do the same things with texts. When they see an essay about undocumented immigrants in California they quickly think about all the things they might know about undocumented immigrants and the things they've heard said in conversations and arguments.

Predicting What an Author Might Say

Once you've taken stock of what you know about the subject a text covers you can start to predict what the text might say. What you know and what you expect go hand in hand. Taking stock and predicting are both important so that as you begin reading a text you have a scaffolding to hang ideas on. As you read along you might be thinking, *"Arguments about immigration usually say X so I'll keep an eye out for X."* Whether your expectations are met or not, you are more likely to understand and remember what the text is actually saying: *"Yep, he did say X about immigration, just like I thought he would."*

Working with Readings

After **scanning** (who, what etc.), **taking stock** (What do you know about X?), and **predicting** (What do you think this author will say about X?) for a text, then what?

A good general strategy is to just **read the whole text** (or, if too long for a session, enough to get a good gist) and then write **Center-of-Gravities**, share, and discuss.

Also, remember, reading is a process and you don't need to know every word to get a draft understanding of a text, *but* if you get a sense that the group doesn't understand an *essential* word, stop, get the dictionaries, and look it up.

But some types of text might especially benefit from a particular response lens:

For a **text broken into sections** with subheadings, try Overall after each section.

For **dense, complicated texts** use 2-Step Summary.

For **narratives**, like a short story or part of a novel, Play-by-play.

For **poems** or **song lyrics**, Reply can work well because you don't get bogged down in   trying to "interpret" the text and can just share what it makes you think of from   your own experiences.

Help! – When Something Goes Wrong

Groups are meant to be a comfortable place, if tutees are disrespecting you or other tutees, or making people feel uncomfortable in any way, come talk to us! We need to help with that. Now, some other problems that might come up:

My group talks too much

Sometimes tutees know each other and will happily talk to each other but exclude the third student. Try switching up the seating. Try to give the excluded student more spotlight by letting them be tutor for the day or by letting them choose a live-write topic.

For general talkativeness, you need to reign in conversations that are purely social. It's okay, even necessary, to socialize, to form a healthy group rapport, but the reason we're here is to get comfortable communicating with writing. Try having tutees write and share about exciting social events. Be on the look out for possible live-write topics that come up in discussions, then stop everyone to write.

My group won't talk

If you have one student that is quiet or shy, you can treat them similar to a student being excluded. Direct some questions toward them, let them choose a live-write topic, or ask them to lead one of the sessions.

If your whole group doesn't seem to want to talk, you could try similar techniques. Ask open ended questions that require them to elaborate, or directly say something like "so tell me about that." Start the session off by writing about something lighthearted and fun like your favorite movies, instead of a private write. Be mindful of the things the group has in common as well as ways you can make them laugh.

My group won't write

There can be several reasons why a student is reluctant to write. Sometimes they get **hung up on correctness** and can't produce much writing because they are worried about each sentence they put down. Try Invisible Writing.

Sometimes **they see writing as completely different than speaking**. When they start telling you something, say "Stop . . . write what you are saying." Before they've even finished their utterance.

Sometimes **they don't know what they *can* write.** Try Looping

Sometimes **they don't want to write for cultural reasons.** I see it most commonly when young men are in a small group together and don't want to seem uncool, or too invested in this school thing. Try Challenging them to write certain amounts.

My group won't bring drafts

You can take a session to look at the calendar, the tutees' syllabi, and actually schedule sessions they will promise to bring in drafts. Discuss what a "draft" can be; papers that have already been graded, or that aren't quite done, or from other classes are OK.

Steps for Dealing with Problems in Groups

The previous page has some ideas about how to deal with some common specific problems. But in general, follow the procedure below when you are struggling with a group or student for any reason:

Try to address problems with group norms immediately (define and remind, insist people read what they wrote). You can do this in a firm way without being dictatorial— just explain that is how the group needs to work.

If that still doesn't work, talk to the student separately— before or after the group about what is going on. Try to gather context, (why they are resistant, reluctant to read what they wrote, etc.).

If the issue involves more than one student you can bring it up in the group and write about it together.

One option we have, if you are frustrated or at the end of your patience, is to have a supe substitute for that group. You can wait in the lounge and will still get paid. This is a way for the supe to gather context on what is going on in your group.

If that still doesn't work ask the student to come talk with a supe at the beginning or end of a group. It is a good idea to give the supe a heads up about what is going on in a group all along, so it isn't a surprise. But if things get bad enough just bring them to the supe.

In extreme cases we can move a tutee to another group or ask them to leave altogether.

Dealing with Polarized Issues or Binaries

Whenever you hear someone talking about "sides," or "pro-" and "anti-" anything, you've probably stumbled into an issue that has been oversimplified into two opposite positions.

Usually there are gray areas between any two positions or, in fact, more than two positions possible. But we have to keep in mind that people often feel very strongly about these kinds of issues and might react with emotion to anything other than agreement.

Keep in mind that **just listening to a paper doesn't mean you agree with the ideas in it**. So, listen to the paper with an open mind, then, look at the questions below as ways to help start a conversation with the writer about the topic:

How did you decide to write about this?

When did you become interested in this topic?

How is this topic important to you?

How are you affected by this problem?

Who do you imagine your audience to be?

How would your audience be affected by this problem?

What would you like to happen because of your piece of writing?

What questions would you like to ask your audience?

Sometimes an instructor or assignment will ask a student writer to include a "naysayer" in their paper which can reinforce thinking of issues in binaries. One way we might help them do what the teacher and prompt are most-likely wanting— a paper that does not ignore complexities— is to use a version of one of the questions above *"Who would be affected by this issue?"* and then write about how each of those parties might think differently about the issue.

Why We Always Read Exactly What We Wrote

You talk every day. You might get nervous in some situations– in front of a big crowd, when it involves a subject really important to you– but **I'd guess you feel comfortable overall with talking.** But what about writing?

If you're asked a question, do you feel comfortable enough to write an answer, read what you wrote out loud, and then feel confident that people listening will understand you and have a good sense of your ideas about that question? **We want you to be that comfortable with writing by the end of the semester.**

Writing like that can be a powerful tool. It allows you to gather your thoughts before you have to share them with others. And because you have those thoughts down on paper, it allows you to come back to them, remember what you said, add to them, or even rethink them.

In order to reach that level of confidence, we have to read exactly what we wrote. Each time you look up from your page of writing and start talking about it, you are allowing yourself to add and explain things that you didn't have in your writing or that you couldn't quite get to make sense.

Imagine the opposite: You're trying to get more comfortable talking and, in the middle of a conversation, get flustered and start reading from cards you prepared ahead of time. You would never gain confidence in your ability to talk without ditching those cards, and you'll never gain confidence in your writing without ditching your verbal explanation. **Let the writing explain.**

It can be tough to just trust what you write because all of the writing in your life has been judged, graded, marked up, and scored. When you think of writing, you think of that. Nobody likes to feel constantly graded and judged, so you're probably reluctant to produce writing because of it. But **we don't grade, score, or mark up anything you write.**

While it's true we might ask questions or ask for clarification, which implies your writing didn't have everything we wanted or confuses us, it's the same kind of thing as asking a friend you're talking with to clarify something they just said– **it's a natural part of communicating, not a judgment.**

In a way, you might say we treat writing like talking, so you don't need to talk after a live-write, **just read what you wrote and "talk" through that.**

Why We Don't Talk About Grammar in Group

Errors are important. Some people will judge you if you have errors in your writing. They might consider you lazy or ignorant if you have grammatical errors or even just typos in your writing. We understand that. But it's hard to work on errors in a group.

One reason is that **errors are individual**. I tend to mix up my "there" and "their." You might not. If you speak a different language than English at home, the structures of that language can show up as errors in your writing in English. But if the language you speak at home is Spanish the errors will be different than if the language you speak at home is Hmong. So we can't assume the kind of errors you make are the same kinds I make. And talking about your errors in a group with people that make different errors is hard to make useful for them.

But even if everyone in the group made the exact same errors, **dealing with errors is only one part of the writing process**. We may have all kinds of questions and confusions about your paper that need to be clarified before it feels convincing or satisfying to us. It can be a waste of your time to look at every single error you have in a paragraph if you decide to cut that paragraph later. Also, carefully polishing and fixing errors in your paper can make it feel done, when you might have bigger issues that still need to be worked on. Dealing with the errors may get in the way of dealing with all those other issues we have. Polishing and fixing errors make a text feel final and so should be handled later in the writing process.

And that's okay because research in linguistics has shown that **many errors get corrected when drafts are revised**. So, you might catch and fix a lot of your errors when you go back to revise your paper after getting your group's feedback.

But, if the group isn't the best place to address grammar what do you do? Well, if you have time, revise for clarity and to answer the questions your group had for your draft then **sign up to meet with a one-on-one tutor** to look *only* for errors in that draft before you turn it in. Our one-on-one tutors are trained to look for patterns of grammatical errors. That way you can get, not only personalized help on the errors you made, but a sense of the kind of errors you tend to make over and over. This can put you in a better position to try and learn how to avoid them in the future.

Why We Don't Tell You What to Change in Your Draft

It might seem frustrating if you think that your tutor is knowledgeable, experienced, and a successful student and yet is keeping something from you. Why don't they just tell you what is wrong with your paper and how to fix it? **But, as a tutor, I don't really *know* what you need to do to make a paper successful for your class.** I haven't read what you've read in your class or been there for your class discussions, I don't know what interests you most, or your background, and how those things shape what you want to say.

And it might seem like a research paper, or a term paper, or an argumentative paper is a clearly defined, certain thing like a pine tree or a rose. And so, if your assignment is a research paper it should be easy to talk about what you need to do to make it and what it needs to have to be a good research paper. But different teachers want, expect, and are interested in different things, so **just like not every pine tree is identical, different teachers see different things in their head when they say research paper**. And that means your tutor can't know exactly what your paper should look like or what you should do next.

What good is a tutor then, if they can't tell you what you should revise in your papers? Well, **a tutor is an experienced reader and can ask questions that help you know what you have in your draft**. And you need to know what you have before you can figure out what you need to do next. Also, if one reader, like your tutor, is confused there's a pretty good chance other readers, like your teacher, will be confused too. So it can still be helpful to learn what response or reactions your tutor is having to your draft in order to help you decide what changes to make.

That's also why **feedback from your group members can be just as useful** even though they might not have any more knowledge or experience about writing than you, the writer do. Our response lenses are designed to help everyone in the group give clear, focused responses. And if your group members want to know more about something in your draft, there's a good chance your teacher will want to know more about that thing too.

In the end, **you'll have to make decisions about which responses are the ones you most need to address** when you revise. It could be, for example, that if the tutor and both of the other group members are really confused by your draft you need to make things clearer somehow. But it could also be that you realize they're only confused because they haven't read the articles your class read and that no one in your class, including your teacher will be confused, so you will focus on other things when you revise. It just depends.

What You Learn by Working on Someone Else's Stuff

For prompts and readings it's pretty straightforward, **the tools we use when we look at someone else's stuff are tools you can take home and use on *your own* prompts and readings**. But what about when you don't bring anything and the group works on another group member's draft? What do you get out of that?

A big part of being a writer is imagining a reader as you write. What is it that will make a reader trust us, understand a complicated argument, or at least not be bored when they're reading what we wrote? One way to find out is to write something, have someone read it, and then *ask them* about their experience. And that's what we're doing when you get feedback on your own drafts. But, again what if it isn't your draft? Well, you can still learn about readers by listening to them react to texts, even if they are reacting to texts that you didn't write. **If you hear the confusions and questions your group members have to a piece of writing you are learning about them as an audience and getting a sense of readers in general**.

But also, **a powerful way to learn about what readers want, is to pay attention to *yourself* when you're a reader**. By reading someone else's draft and exploring your response in writing you can get a better idea of what it takes to convince *you*, what kinds of things make *you* laugh, or even just how much information you need to follow along in a paper. So, looking at your group member's drafts and taking time to figure out your own reactions to them can be really helpful to you as a writer. Now, the audience you're writing for isn't always going to be just like you. They might be older, for example, or from a different country, or have a different amount of education. But paying attention to yourself as a reader is a good place to start if you want to get better at writing clear, interesting, and even powerful writing for other people.

When Something Very Personal Comes Up in Group

First, we don't need to reveal private or intimate details about our lives to have good conversations through writing. But every so often someone will bring in a draft that has a topic that pushes towards the private, like domestic abuse, or alcoholism. So, we need to be careful because we are not trained therapists or social workers. **If someone brings in an essay that is on a topic that could be very personal ask: *"This seems very personal. Are you okay sharing it in the group?"*** And if they say they do want to share their writing, avoid responding in ways that would force the other group members to disclose equally personal things (so, no Reply).

Often, we try to personalize the abstract academic topics people are asked to write about, for example, *"What is the purpose of education?"* becomes *"Why are you here in college?"* **But in the case of a very personal topic, you may need to use live-write prompts to make that topic more general and *less* personal.** So, if a group member brings in an essay on their own personal drug addiction, and insists they want to share, then we might need to broaden the topics we'll all write about into something like: *"How does our culture view addiction?"* or *"What policies does the government have that affect addicts?*–a more general topic.

One thing to keep in mind is that group members come from different contexts, have had different experiences, and hold different identities (gender, class, race, SES, religion, political affiliation, etc.). So, **sometimes a topic that doesn't seem personal to you, may turn out to be very personal to one of the group members**. That doesn't mean we should be afraid; just **be careful about making assumptions about your group members' experiences or beliefs.** If the group begins discussing immigration, someone in the group might be from a family of immigrants. Or if the conversation turns to law enforcement or social programs, someone in the group may have had personal experiences that they may react very strongly to.

Also, if someone does share something very personal in a draft or response, after we've had a discussion, we should **mention to the group that it's important to be respectful and not share personal information outside of the group.**

Why We Ask You to Bring a Printed Draft

It makes sense to want to work on a draft digitally, it saves paper, saves you money, and is just convenient, but it can make reading and responding to your drafts and prompts awkward and inconvenient for the rest of us in the group. And just having the device you need to look at a digital text can be a barrier to us interacting as a group.

First, if there's only one way to look at a draft at the table, it's really hard for everyone in the group to follow along. **Having a printed copy on each side of the table makes sure everyone can clearly see the draft in front of them**, know where we are in a text, and understand it.

Also, **if there are laptops at the table, having the screen up is like a wall between us.** I can't see where you are in a prompt or the expressions you make as you read. We can try to put the laptop at the end of the table, but it means we have to awkwardly hunch over to try and see and then decide when to scroll the screen.

Another issue that can come up is, with a device in front of you, **you may be tempted to make small changes to a digital text as we read and discuss it, instead of listening to our reactions and taking part in our conversation.** With a paper copy, you may still want to jot notes but it isn't quite as distracting as trying to revise sentences or cut and paste parts of your draft while we're still having a discussion about it. It works better if you use the group to give you feedback that lets you know what changes you might make, and then use your own time to make those changes later.

Finally, **technology can be distracting**. if you have to pass a laptop or tablet around, it's cumbersome, it takes time, and there's the risk of dropping and breaking it. Devices can also distract you by making noises, popping up notifications, or just tempting you to check your social media. A printed copy lets us read a text and then push it aside to have a discussion, it won't keep demanding our attention.

Mid-Semester Reflections

Which moments come to mind when you think back over the semester
in our group so far?

What has been the hardest for you about group?

What questions do you have about what we've done in groups?

How would you explain what we do to a friend?

How is our group different from small groups in your classes?

How will you ask for feedback on your writing when you're out of the Writing Center?

How do you write differently now?

How do you think about writing differently now?

How do you revise differently now?

How do you think about revision differently now?

What have you learned about responding to writing?

What strengths or skills do you bring to the tutorial?

What would you say to prepare a student starting the Writing Center next semester?

What do you most need to learn next?

What suggestions do you have for tutors or the Writing Center?

How have you used what we've done in our group in your other classes?

Group Rules

One Session, one draft, one lens

Everyone writes

Everyone writes the same lens

Everyone reads aloud exactly what they wrote

No discussion or comments until everyone has shared their writing

Don't worry about spelling and errors

Don't judge texts
We are treating these as drafts that aren't finished. It doesn't make sense to say something is good or bad when it isn't done.

Don't tell writers what to do
Our responses will help you share the questions, confusions, and interests you have. Let the writer decide what to do with that new information.

Bring two copies of each draft printed out

Assessing Students in our Small Writing Groups

How do we know groups are "working?" How do we know students are learning or benefitting from what we do? Well, just by participating in our small writing groups students will be accomplishing many things that successful writers need to be able to do.
You can think of these as learning or course outcomes. Here is a list of such outcomes:

Students as producers of writing
Students are able to produce writing on demand. That writing is a complete thought or utterance, not just bullet points or a few sentences.
They're able to produce writing in response to another writer's texts they've just read.
They're also able to produce writing that is a legitimate response to a question they just heard.
They can transition from sharing their written response to talking about the thoughts it contains (not just judge it, or react with a binary agree/disagree).
They can then continue that discussion in writing by answering questions or exploring new ideas that came up in their talking, in other words, they can add to and complicate what they already started writing.
They're also able to turn a general conversation topics (like the purpose of education) into specific personal ones (like why they are here in college), bringing anecdotes and details from their own lives into their written responses.

Students as revisers of texts
They're able to ask for certain kinds of response to their writing.
They're able to engage in discussion about written responses they've received on their writing.
They're able to make revision choices based on feedback they've got.

Students as meta-reflectors
They're able to think about their own qualities as a writer (when, where, how they produce texts).
They're aware of their own expectations and reactions as they read through texts.
They're able to conceive of future audiences and what those readers may need to understand their text.

Several lenses in this booklet originated in:

Elbow, Peter and Pat Belanoff. *Sharing and Responding*. 3rd ed. McGraw Hill, 1999.

and were adapted through extensive use in small group tutorials at The Writing Center at California State University Fresno by Magda Gilewicz, Kirk Stone and many fine tutors.

Writers, you can ask these questions about your draft:

After reading this, what really sticks in your mind? (Center-of-Gravity)

After reading this, what do you think of? (Reply)

What do you want to hear more about? (More About)

What do you hear me saying overall? (Overall)

What reactions do you have as you read through my paper? (Play-by-play)

Can we look closely at what each of my paragraphs is saying? (2-Step Summary)

Who do you imagine I'm writing this to? (Audience)

How do you see my sources talking to each other? (Conversation Map)

Can you tell me all the claims I'm making and what support I give (Skeleton Feedback)

What kind of voice, or voices, do you hear in this writing? (Voice)

What am I almost saying, but not quite? (Almost Said)

How do you see the parts of my essay working together? (Where & Why)