

Dana Bruhn, Candidate for Master in English Studies
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Peer Review in the Facilitation of Class Discussion in the Distance Learning Classroom

I am the intern for Suzanne Bunker's English 275 Introduction to Literary Studies class this semester. Part of my duties as intern has been to facilitate the weekly online synchronous discussion for the class. Each Wednesday the students log into D2L for a class chat session. By the time they log in for class chat, the students are expected to have read the week's content as listed on the class's D2L page, posted in asynchronous discussion forums, and also have taken a reading quiz. The result has been that the students log into chat on Wednesdays ready to practice some of the concepts they have been reading and discussing throughout the rest of the week.

I have created a Peer Review system for this aspect of the class in order to motivate students to participate fully and respectfully in these weekly online class chat sessions, as well as help me to structure the groups in a way that fosters cohesive learning communities. The Peer Review Chat system I have created is a four step process:

- Step 1: The students all report to the class chat room. The instructor assigns a group leader, different discussion question(s) for each group, and then asks the groups to report back to the class chat at a specific time.
- Step 2: The groups break off into their respective chat rooms. During the group discussions, the instructor follows each chat. While following along, he or she creates prompts designed to draw out the particular unit's learning objectives from each group's discussion.
- Step 3: The groups sign back into the class chat. At this time the group and its leader review the main points of their discussion with the other groups. If necessary, the instructor might offer the prompts created in step two. This method enables the students themselves to teach each other the learning objectives of the week, serving as an excellent alternative to lecturing.
- Step 4: Right after class, students complete a Peer Review sheet and submit it via D2L dropbox. I use their feedback when grading students' participation and attendance. Students must submit a Peer Review in order to get all of their participation points.

This system has served the class well. Not only do the students know their contributions are going to be assessed, but also that all group members are accountable for their level of participation and discussion input. The students appreciate having their feedback taken into account when doing group work, and I am able to shift the students around to create balance within the groups. The results have been very positive. The students are working well within their groups during synchronous class chats, and have gone beyond what is expected of them by creating small writing groups.

The following can be found in the course's syllabus to set the expectations of the students' right from the beginning of the semester:

WEEKLY CHAT AND GROUPS

Each Wednesday you will log into D2L from 6-7pm for the weekly chat. You will be assigned a weekly discussion group that you will work in for the duration of the semester. The way the weekly chat will take place is the following:

Once everyone has arrived in the class chat, each group will be given a discussion topic and then a group leader and a time frame will be designated. Each group will then go to their respective group discussion forum. You will return to the class chat once the time limit is up to share your groups observations and points with the rest of us. At the end of each class chat, you must submit a peer review sheet for your group-mates via D2L drop box.

Peer Review Sheet

Your Name:

Date of Discussion:

Group Number:

Group Member's Name:

___ T/F This group member showed up for the discussion and remained for its duration

___ T/F This group member contributed to the discussion in a thoughtful way

___ T/F This group member had read the corresponding material

___ T/F This group member was courteous and helpful in keeping the discussion engaging

Additional comments:

Copy and paste the above text to create an entry for each group member.