

Guidelines for peer reviewers

VIEW YOURSELF AS A COACH, NOT A JUDGE.

Think of yourself as a proposer of possibilities, not a dictator of revisions. It is the writer, after all, who will have to grapple with the task of improving the essay.

MAKE AT LEAST SOME DESCRIPTIVE COMMENTS.

Not all comments need to be evaluative. Sometimes it's helpful just to describe your response. For example, if the writer's subject is physical disabilities, you might comment, "I think your point is that many adults are insensitive and patronizing when they encounter persons with physical disabilities."

WHERE POSSIBLE, COMPLIMENT THE WRITER. BE SPECIFIC.

Vague compliments (such as "I liked your essay") sound insincere—and they aren't helpful. Point out specific successes. For example, you might mention that the writer's second paragraph contains a powerful example of insensitivity toward people with physical disabilities.

LINK SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT TO THE WRITER'S GOALS.

Criticism is constructive when it is offered in the right spirit. For example, you might advise the writer to put the most dramatic example last, where it will have the maximum impact on readers. Or you might suggest that a passage would gain power if abstractions were replaced with concrete details.

TELL THE WRITER WHERE YOU WOULD LIKE TO HEAR MORE.

When you indicate an interest in hearing more about a topic, the writer is often inspired to come up with useful and vivid details—such as a bit of dialogue that perfectly illustrates just how patronizing some people can be toward those with physical disabilities.

EXPRESS INTEREST IN READING THE NEXT DRAFT.

When your interest is sincere, expressing it can be a powerful motivation for a writer.