

## DIRECTIONS FOR A USEFUL CRITIQUE/PEER REVIEW PAPER

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usf | ver. 05.03.12

A peer critique has a primary and a secondary function. The primary function is to help the author improve the quality of his or her paper. The secondary function is to demonstrate your ability to provide useful feedback and thoughtful recommendations for improving imperfect work. In either case, you are looking to provide substantive, critical, but explicitly constructive recommendations regarding some text.

A peer critique has a mostly familiar structure, as far as paper writing goes. However, it has some very specific components that you should not neglect to include. To that end, here's an outline of what your peer critique should look like:

1. **Introduction:** Summarize the paper you are critiquing, and be sure to state the thesis, and any general evaluation you have. (Why? Doing this shows that you actually understood what the author was trying to do. It flags for the author (and the instructor!) whether more clarity is needed on the part of the author on these matters, and it says something about how closely you read the paper.)
2. **The part where you are nice:** Here, you highlight some strengths of the paper, even if there aren't many. Most papers have at least *something* of redeeming value, so make sure you note that, if for no other reason than signaling that at least that element shouldn't be lost in the revision. (Be careful not to damn with disingenuous praise. To note that the author "demonstrated good taste by writing in the English language" is not a compliment in this context.)
3. **The part where you are critical:** Focus on what needs improvement (including grammar/formatting, arguments, etc.). This is the meat of your critique. Make it clear, precise, and altogether free of personal attacks. Keep the focus on quality of *the paper* and not *the author*.
4. **The part where you are constructive:** Explain how the paper might address some or all of these complaints. Suggest various paths to improvement. You don't have to write the paper for the author, but this is your chance to provide some useful suggestions about how the author might reasonably attempt to address the criticisms that you are worried about.
5. **Conclude:** give some overall assessment that lets the author (and the course instructor) know what you think about the overall status of the paper in its current incarnation.