

PEER

Peer review of teaching





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About this handbook

What is peer review of teaching?

Peer review of teaching can be encountered in different forms, under different names and for different purposes. Most commonly, it is known as peer observation, which usually means that a teacher's classroom performance is observed and commented on by a colleague. However, other, non-performative aspects of teaching can also be the focus of peer review. Examples include assessment tasks, revisions of unit guides or teaching materials, development and review of units or assessment tasks or mapping of programs to graduate capabilities.

Peer review of teaching is often used as summative teaching evaluation mandated for promotion, probation or performance review purposes. In these contexts, the reviewer is more likely to be a supervisor or expert, rather than a peer. Alternatively, peer review of teaching can be conducted in the spirit of quality enhancement. In this context, the focus of the review process is professional development of peers interested in improving their teaching.

This handbook and the resources within it emphasise collegiality and support peer review as a process that is negotiated between the reviewee and the reviewer. In addition, peer review of teaching is viewed as a reciprocal, cyclical and iterative process, which is underpinned by communication and embedded within the context of the respective department, faculty or institution.

Who is this handbook for?

This handbook is intended to provide practical and systematic support for academic and non-academic teaching staff preparing to engage in peer review of teaching. The resources contained within this handbook are informed by current scholarship on the topic. They are based on the **PEER** Review Model and guide the reader step-by-step through a cycle of peer review. Also included in this handbook are suggested forms for recording and reporting findings. Online versions of these forms are available on the above mentioned websites and can be modified to meet users' needs.

Complementary resources can be found on the Peer Review of Teaching (<http://peerreviewofteaching.net/>) and Peer Review of Learning and Teaching (http://staff.mq.edu.au/teaching/teaching_development/peer/) websites. These resources address communication aspects, in particular giving feedback, the institutional context of peer review as well as related publications. It is recommended that the reviewer and reviewee also consult these print and video resources for a holistic approach to peer review.

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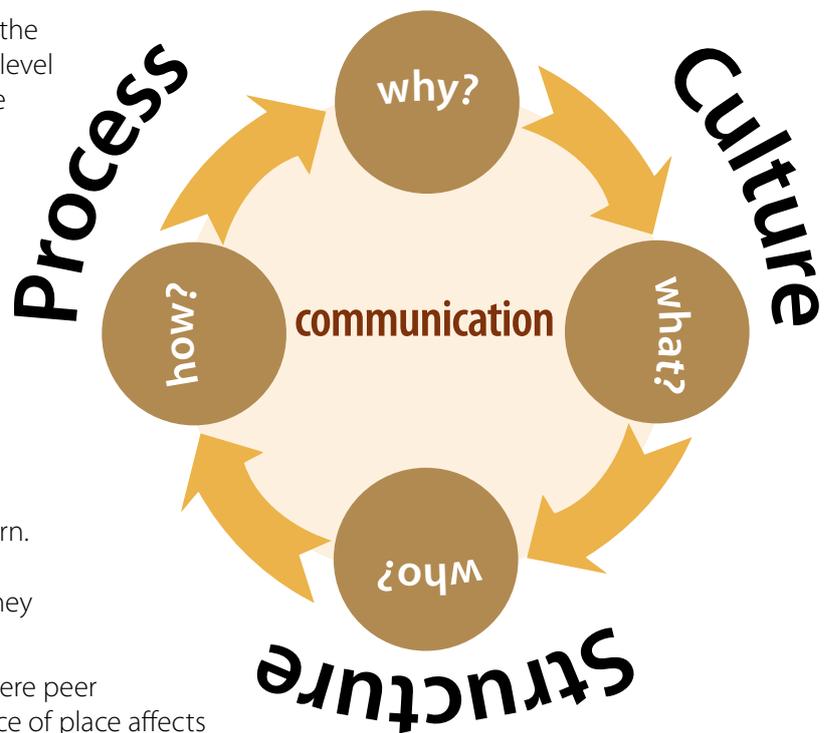
The PEER Model

The **PEER** Model is a theoretical model, which is grounded in data and themes emerging from the “Social, Communicative and Interpersonal Leadership in the Context of Peer Review” project. It has been extensively evaluated and amended in line with feedback received from national and international project partners, core project team members and co-investigators.

The **PEER** Model consists of three interrelated layers, namely communication, the process of peer review and its institutional context. It depicts peer review processes which are underpinned by communication and embedded into the institutional context.

Communication constitutes the core of the model and underpins both the process level as well as the institutional context of the model. Project data revealed four key themes:

- Affect explores how comfortable reviewer and reviewee are with engaging in peer review. It also discusses issues of respect and trust.
- Attitude examines how attitudes towards research and teaching affect approaches to peer review.
- Collegiality emerged as a key concern. This theme discusses how peers interact with each other and how they share feedback and information.
- Places reveals a variety of places where peer review can occur and how the choice of place affects communication among peers.



The process of peer review constitutes the middle layer of the model. The “why”, what”, “who” and “how” of peer review are interrelated. Arrows indicate the causal and cyclic nature of their connection with each other. Although the cycle can be entered at any point the relationships between the constituents is unidirectional. If, for instance, the entry point to the peer review cycle is the “why” – then the purpose would affect what is reviewed – the “what”, which would inform the choice of peer – the “who”, which in turn would influence the choice of mode – the “how”. Alternatively, if the entry point is the focus for the peer review process, then this would influence the choice of peer, the mode and the purpose of the review process.

Culture, Structure and Process form the outer layer of the model and provide the institutional context in which peer review of teaching is embedded. An institution’s peer review culture in relation to teaching is shaped by the degree to which it values teaching, while institutional structures and formal peer review processes inform how peer review is facilitated.

The Process of Peer Review

Start Here

Why do you want to be reviewed?

What is to be reviewed?

Who will be the reviewer?

How will the review happen?

Reporting ... what documentation?

Suggestions for giving constructive feedback

Follow-up ... what happens next?

Peer review of teaching

Start here . . .

- ***This kit is intended to provide a simple introduction to peer review of teaching***
- ***It's meant for both those who will be reviewed and those doing the reviewing.***

1. Each card addresses a topic that you should think about

Have a look at all the cards now to get an overall idea of the issues

Why? Think about what you want to achieve.

What? What is to be reviewed?

Who? Who will be the reviewer?

How? How will the peer review take place?

Reporting? How are the results to be communicated?

Followup? Questions to think about after the review and reporting.

2. It's a cycle, but you need to start somewhere

If you're new to peer review, you might want to start with **Why?** Getting a clear idea of your aims will help guide the rest of the process.

Then perhaps move on to **What?** and **Who?** will be the reviewer.

Once you know who is working with you, you can discuss with them **How?** And **Reporting?**

After that comes **Followup?**

Once you're more familiar with peer review you can decide on an order that suits you.

Think about keeping notes to help your planning and reflection.

Communicate as much as possible about your goals and intentions to the other people involved in the review.

3. What else is in this kit

A diagram of the model of peer review underlying the design of these materials

Some sample forms for the reviewer(s). They range from the very informal to the highly detailed. You can use them as is or as the basis for your own forms.

A selected list of references and other materials, if you wish to read further about peer review

Peer review of teaching

- *Think about why you want a peer to review your teaching or material.*
- *Make notes, they'll help in your later reflection.*
- *Let the other people involved know your intentions.*

1. You want help with a particular issue in your teaching:

This can be useful in addressing an issue that appears, eg. in student feedback.

You need to be very clear with the reviewers exactly what you want reviewed.

It can help focus the review and in getting precise recommendations. However, if the focus is defined too narrowly, the reviewer may miss other useful information.

2. You want feedback to identify issues you may not be aware of:

This can be useful in general teaching enhancement.

It doesn't take a great deal of preparation.

Reviewer recommendations may comment on areas you are not expecting – be prepared for this.

Reviewer recommendations may be in areas you consider unimportant or difficult to act upon – be prepared to discuss this with them.

3. You want to engage with your colleagues in discussions about teaching:

You should let your reviewers know that you are looking for ongoing discussions.

Making yourself the subject can get people talking without feeling threatened.

Many of the comments under 2. apply here.

4. You want to get promoted:

Make sure you know the requirements for documentation for promotion purposes and that your reviewers are happy to satisfy them.

See if you can use it for one of the above purposes as well.

We don't recommend peer review as being mandatory for any reason, including this one.

Peer review of teaching

- *What is to be reviewed?*
- *You can have peers observe/review anything to do with your teaching, not just what happens in the classroom. It's up to you.*

1. Preparation

Always spend some time with your reviewer beforehand, discussing and agreeing on what is to be reviewed, the range and scope of the review and the issues you are seeking to address.

Putting this down in writing keeps everyone on the same page and helps in your reflections on the results.

2. If the review is to be in the classroom

A lot happens in the classroom, so think about, and discuss with your reviewer, how general or specific you want their review to be.

Specific reviews may address the issues you identify, but miss other matters. Do you want reviewers to note things outside the range you've defined?

General reviews still won't catch everything. The reviewer may note issues you hadn't thought about. For a really general review you may need to ask the reviewers not to spend too much time concentrating on one or two issues.

3. A lecture? A tutorial? A laboratory?

The answer should come from deciding what you want reviewed.

Be aware that the smaller the number of students in a class the more a reviewer will be noticeable – which may make everyone a little uncomfortable unless some effort is taken. It would help to suggest positive things that can be done to put everyone at ease. A reviewer might blend in with a large lecture – not so likely for a small tutorial.

4. Can things outside the classroom be reviewed?

A lot of teaching happens outside the classroom, so for instance reviewers can look at teaching materials or handling/marking of student submissions.

Again it's important to agree with the reviewer what is being reviewed – specific issues or the general nature of the material.

Reviews of materials do not need to be done with you present, so they can be easier to organise than classroom review.

Peer review of teaching

- *Who should I get to observe me?*
- *It could be one person—keeps it simpler.*
- *More than one reviewer may get more insights.*
- *Regardless of level, discipline, etc., it should be someone you respect.*
- *Think about making it reciprocal.*

1. Should it be someone in my discipline?

They will understand your subject material, and look at content issues, but an outsider may give fresh perspectives, and consider more general teaching practice.

Someone from outside your discipline may be able to bring fresh perspectives on teaching.

A long-term conversation might be easier with someone in your discipline.

2. Should it be someone at my level of appointment?

Someone on a different level may have a different perspective to you, which can be useful in reflecting on your teaching practice.

Someone at a lower level may be uncomfortable critiquing your teaching. Make sure you are clear about how open you are if you partner with someone in this position.

Be aware of the potential problems if one of you is on a contract or is employed on a casual basis and the other isn't.

3. Should I get someone who I know has similar teaching practices? Or that I have a good relationship with?

That can make discussion and communication easier.

They may be more aware of the issues confronting you, but be aware that you may share common faults.

They may be unwilling to critique you. If so, make it clear how open you are to criticism.

4. Someone in my discipline but outside my department?

If they're from your discipline but at another university they'll understand the content but may be unaware of local issues.

You could even get someone from outside the university system (an industry or clinical professional). They may have valuable insights about discipline practice, but be unfamiliar with teaching principles or specifics.

5. Should it be staff enrolled in particular professional development programs?

Targeted programs can effectively engage new staff or those with a particular interest in teaching.

Peer review of teaching

How will the review take place? It depends on the purpose of the review:

- *It could be informal.*
- *It could be very formal.*
- *It depends on what you want to achieve.*

1. Where will the review take place?

If you have organised for your teaching to be observed then your colleague will need to attend the relevant lecture, tutorial or practical session.

If you favour a formal system then you will need pre and post briefings in a mutually agreed space, such as an office or meeting room.

If you favour an informal system the location could be more relaxed: a coffee shop, tea room, in the corridor, while walking back to the office, etc.

If you want your materials reviewed you might not even need to meet face-to-face: it could all happen by email

2. What does the reviewer do?

If you asked the reviewer to observe your teaching then they will need to attend the relevant session.

If this is a large lecture the reviewer's presence will probably go unnoticed.

In a small tutorial or practical session the students will probably notice the reviewer's presence and this will change the dynamic - be aware of this.

It is up to you whether you tell the students what you are doing.

Remember that this is a reciprocal process of learning and teaching.

A reviewer can benefit from reviewing your teaching and using that in reflections on their own teaching.

3. What form(s) to use?

If you favour a formal system you will probably want to use specifically designed forms (see Reporting).

If you favour an informal system you may not even need forms - a chat can often be enough.

Between these extremes you have a great deal of flexibility - where you fall depends on what you wish to achieve.

Peer review of teaching

- *Reporting: How will the results be communicated?*
- *What documentation is produced during the entire review process?*
- *How long is documentation kept?*
- *By whom is it kept?*
- *How are results of the review communicated to the reviewee?*

1. What documentation will be produced?

This kit contains a range of sample forms you could use or adapt. An informal review need produce no documentation at all. A formal review can produce a range of documentation including:

- i. Pre-briefing notes specifying what is to be reviewed (e.g. lecture) and the desired focus (e.g. ability to engage all students);
- ii. Reviewer's report on session or materials based on (i);
- iii. Reviewee's response to reviewer's report;
- iv. Notes on de-brief session during which reviewer and reviewee discuss (ii) and (iii); and,
- v. Action plan that identifies reviewee's professional development needs in light of (iv).

2. Who owns the documentation?

If the review does produce documentation it is essential that all involved are clear about who owns it and how it may be used. There are two scenarios: owned by the reviewee or owned by the university.

If the reviewee owns the documentation it is up to them how to use it and who to show it to.

They may decide to use it in a promotion application or they may decide not to show it to anyone and just use it to plan their own professional development.

Even if the documentation is owned by the reviewee it is generally advisable to seek the reviewers permission to use the documentation in promotions or formal reviews.

If the university owns the documentation, who is responsible for passing on the documentation, how it will be stored, who will have access to it and how it can be used should be clearly specified in university policy.

3. How are the results communicated to the reviewee?

The first thing to consider is the timing of communication.

A very informal chat can happen directly after the lecture on the way back to the office.

At the other end of the spectrum a very formal process requires time for the reviewer to prepare their report and the reviewee to prepare their response before the post-review meeting.

If you are reviewing materials a face-to-face meeting may not be necessary.

Or you may want a face-to-face debrief.

Or you may like to combine comments on the teaching materials with a face-to-face debrief.

Peer review of teaching

Suggestions for Giving Constructive Feedback

Offering constructive feedback to colleagues is an essential part of the peer review process (Gosling, 2002). Giving quality feedback is vital for developing a professional conversation where all parties can exchange information about teaching that leads to a growth in knowledge, skills, understandings and confidence. Ovando (2005, p. 173) suggests that constructive feedback occurs in a collaborative “climate of respect and trust acknowledging strengths, identifying areas of development, praising extra professional efforts, asking questions for future reflection” and providing suggestions that “encourage teachers to excel” in their practice. Reciprocal peer relationships create an opportunity for all to learn and reflective questions offer a useful starting point for initiating constructive feedback. Below is a list of questions that could be used to promote reflection and constructive feedback in the context of peer review:

Reflective Questions – Some Suggestions

Plural forms

- What are the reasons for ...?
- What are some of the goals ...?

Exploratory tentative language

- What might be the causes of ...?
- What are some of the ways ...?
- Please tell me a little bit more about ...?
- What do you think would happen if ...?
- How did you decide?

Positive presuppositions using enabling language

- As you recall ...
- As you anticipated ...
- As you examined ...
- I'm curious about ...
- To what extent ...
- What are some of the goals you have in mind?
- As you consider alternatives what seems promising?

Peer review of teaching

- *What do we do once the results are communicated?*
- *You need to decide what use to make of the reviewer's comments.*
- *This doesn't have to be the end.*
- *The following applies to both reviewees and reviewers.*

1. Do we keep talking?

This may be an opportunity to start a longer term discussion about teaching.

Think about doing more peer reviews in the future.

Peer review is only one way to assist in developing each other's teaching.

Even if you want different partners, with different points of view next time, there could be value in maintaining the contacts you just made.

2. Have you changed anything in your teaching?

Has this process made a difference?

Did it address the issue you started with? (assuming you had a goal in mind at the beginning).

How can you tell whether any changes are successful or not?

Can the students notice a difference? And does that always matter?

3. Reflect on what happened in the peer review process.

When do you think it would be worthwhile to be reviewed again?

What would you keep for next time, what would you do differently?

Would you review the same aspect of teaching?

Make the focus broader or narrower?

Partner with the same people or look for others?

4. You're experienced now (if you weren't already).

You can assist colleagues who might be thinking of trying peer review.

Your practical experience can help your future teaching development and those of others.

You might want to think about examining the literature in the light of your experience.

Or even contributing to it.

Forms

Providing feedback to the reviewee can take many different forms. In cases of informal peer review conducted purely to clarify or improve an aspect of teaching, a chat or a quick note may be sufficient. However, where the purpose of the peer review is more formal, e.g. for use in promotion or awards applications, written feedback may be required.

This chapter of the handbook offers three different forms for recording observations and feedback. The Free Response form is most suited for peer review where the reviewer has been asked for general feedback and a topic for the review has not been specified.

The Identified Topic form allows the reviewer and reviewee to negotiate topics before the review takes place and then focus the reviewer's attention to them.

The Check List form specifies a range of topics and characteristics and records whether they have been present. The example given relates to classroom observation, however, the form can easily be adapted to other topics, e.g. elements of an assessment task.

These forms are also available in electronic format as pdf and Word documents on the Peer Review of Teaching (<http://peerreviewofteaching.net/process/forms/>) and Peer Review of Learning and Teaching (http://staff.mq.edu.au/teaching/teaching_development/peer/peer-resources/) websites. In their Word format, the forms can be easily adapted as needed.

Reviewee:		Reviewer:	
Date:		Unit:	
Activity Type:			

Reviewee:		Reviewer:	
Date:		Unit:	
Activity Type:			

TOPIC:

TOPIC:

TOPIC:

TOPIC:

Reviewee:		Reviewer:	
Date:		Unit:	
Activity Type:			

TOPIC:	Observed?	Brief Comment
Planning/Organisation/Content		
Teaching purposes are clear and stated in appropriate term e.g. aims, outcomes etc		
Teaching purposes are appropriate to the needs, experience and abilities of students		
Structure of session: introduction, development, conclusion is evident		
Content is appropriate for the level, abilities, needs and interests of students		
Content is well researched and up-to-date		
Teaching Strategies/Resources		
Methods are appropriate to purposes of session		
Methods are chosen with regard to students' age, abilities, needs and needs of unit/content		

Methods are chosen to gain interest and participation		
Class management is effective and appropriate		
Resources are used effectively and complement content, methods and purposes		
Presentation, Management etc		
Effective presentation/ communication skills are used		
Employs effective use of questioning to promote monitoring and understanding		
Student contributions and participation is encouraged in a positive atmosphere		
Equal opportunities exist for all students		
Assessment/Monitoring		
Suitable methods are used to identify and monitor student progress		
Constructive feedback is provided		

Planning/Organisation/Content
Teaching Strategies/Resources
Presentation/Class Relationships/Class management
Assessment and Monitoring of Students
Additional Comments and Suggestions for Future Development

Supporting resources

Communication resources

PEER communication resources (<http://peerreviewofteaching.net/communication/>)

Websites

Peer Review of Teaching (<http://peerreviewofteaching.net/>)

Peer Review of Learning and Teaching (http://staff.mq.edu.au/teaching/teaching_development/peer/)

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