Guidelines for constructive feedback during the writing process

1. On first read: Read the introduction, then note what expectations the text sets up for you as a reader for the rest of the text. What background information do you expect? What claim do you expect to be supported? What questions do you have for the text? It's often helpful for writers to see this feedback, so consider including one in-text comment with your initial expectations based on the introduction, and another about whether or not they were met after you read the rest of the text.

2. After you read the entire text, summarize it. This helps the author determine what sticks for the reader and what might need to be adjusted if the reader's message isn't what the writer intended. Your summary will be used in your summary feedback (see #4) as well as in the in-person feedback session. Example phrases to use:
   a. *What I remember most from this text is…because…*
   b. *I especially noticed…*
   c. *Most focus seemed to be on...*
   d. *The most interesting things about this for me were…because…*
   e. *The main idea seemed to be….*

3. On the second and third reads, consider the following (in this order), making notes in the margins.
   a. Does the introduction present relevant context, a problem, a claim, and significance of the paper? Anything else you feel is missing? (Don't forget what expectations the introduction set up for you as a reader)
   b. Does the argument progress clearly from one section to the next? Do you understand how each part is relevant to achieving the paper's claim? Is all evidence clearly explained? Does the text use appropriate and effective meta-commentary to do this? Note especially where the structure breaks down and becomes unclear or confusing.
   c. Are there any immediate source use concerns? Can you always follow who is speaking?
   d. Does the paragraphing make sense and does each section and paragraph serve a clear purpose that is easily grasped? (i.e., relevant description or summary, reasons and evidence with explanation, etc.). Note especially unclear or confusing paragraphs.
   e. Does the conclusion draw together all aspects of the argument? If not, what's missing? Were your expectations met? Was the claim supported?
   f. Are the word choice and tone appropriate? How's the grammar? Are the sentences complete and easy to read or are there often errors?

4. Formulate your feedback, both in-text and in a summary text. Remember that your feedback is also a type of text (whether written or oral) and that it must also be well structured with your recipient in mind. Prioritize your comments according to the

hierarchy in #3; unfocused feedback with many points can be overwhelming and counterproductive. Your feedback summary should include:

a. What is the best part of the paper? (Be specific; see note below about subjective adjectives)
b. Which areas need the most improvement? (The point here isn't to address EVERYTHING that could be improved, but the 3 areas that need the most work, or would make the biggest impact on a new draft of the paper.) The point is that your feedback looks forward to possibilities, not to imperatives.
    i. *You could try…*
    ii. *What would happen if…*
    iii. *If you instead…I think that…*

Important! Avoid subjective adjectives without explanation and examples. "Good," "bad," and "interesting" do not give helpful information to the writer unless accompanied with something concrete. What made you react that way? Don't read between the lines but instead focus on the choices, in language and content, that the writer has made and what consequences they have for your reading. Ask questions, both about what you didn't understand and what you want to know more about.

a. *I think this text became difficult to read when…*
b. *The last paragraph was great because…*
c. *The evidence seemed strongest/weakest when…*
d. *Why did you choose…?*
e. *How do you want your readers to react when…?*
f. *What does…mean?*
g. *I didn't fully understand…*

At the beginning of your in-person sessions, briefly discuss some ground rules for receiving feedback. For example:

Be constructive in how you receive feedback just as you give it. Challenge yourself to stay in the situation and listen. If you already know that you'll quickly want to defend yourself, practice accepting feedback as information about this specific communication situation, not about you as a person or an absolute truth about your text. Reflect on how the feedback can help you develop as a writer, not only this one text. Importantly, ask if you don't understand the feedback! Be aware that it's a normal part of the writing process for an idea to be clearer in your head than on the page.

Guidelines are an expanded version of Exhibit H.1. in "Sample Reader Response/Peer Review instrument" in *How Learning Works: 7 Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (2010) by Ambrose et. al.