

## Start here...

- » This resource kit is intended to provide a simple introduction to peer review of teaching in online and blended learning environments.
- » Resources are meant for both those who will be reviewed and those doing the reviewing.
- » The focus is on having a productive conversation between reviewer and reviewee as the basis for the formation of peer partnerships.

### 1. Each stage addresses a topic that you should think about

**Why?** What is the purpose of your review?

**What?** What do you want to learn about your teaching and/or your students' learning?

**Who?** Who is the most appropriate person to be your peer review partner?

**How?** What is the process?

**Prompt questions:** To guide the focus of your peer review.

**Learning conversations:** Approach to giving feedback.

**Reporting:** How are the results of the conversation to be communicated?

**Follow-up:** Questions and actions to think about after the review and learning conversation.

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

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

Then perhaps move on to “**What?**”.

With your peer review partner you can discuss “**How?**”. Have a look at “**Prompt Questions**” and “**Learning Conversations**”. After that comes “**Reporting**” and “**Follow-up**”.

Once you're more familiar with peer review you can decide on an order that suits you. Keep notes to help your planning and reflection.

Communicate as much as possible about your goals and intentions and outcomes with your peer partner and more widely.

### 3. What else is in this resource kit?

A list of selected references for your further reading.

- » **There are different ways to think about peer review, depending on the outcome you want to achieve.**
- » **Why do you want a peer to review your teaching or materials?**
- » **How will your peer review help improve or enhance student learning?**
- » **Record your answers to the questions above in a reflective journal. This will help in your later reflection.**
- » **Share this information with your peer partner so that this person clearly understands your intentions.**

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### 1. You want help with a particular issue in your online and blended teaching

This can be useful in addressing an issue that concerns you, e.g. the design of your online site, the quality of student interaction, your facilitation of a Collaborate session, etc.

Identifying the issue can help focus the review and help provide suggestions for improvement and development.

You need to be clear with your peer partner exactly what you want reviewed.

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### 2. You want to collect evidence

For promotion.

For teaching awards and grant applications.

For general development of your teaching.

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### 3. You want to ensure standards

For appropriate course design for online and blended learning.

For consistency and completeness of unit/course materials.

For equivalence of the student experience, regardless of mode of study.

For any other standard you want to ensure.

- » **Think about what aspect of your online or blended teaching you want a peer to review. What is your goal? What do you want to achieve?**
- » **Add this information to your learning journal/wiki/blog. This will help in your later reflection.**
- » **Ensure you keep the conversation going with your partner to maintain clarity about your intentions.**

## 1. What can be peer reviewed?

In an online or blended teaching environment all or a lot of the teaching can happen online. For instance, reviewers can look at teaching materials or handling/marking of student submissions, student interactions and typical quality of feedback given to students.

Reviews of materials do not need to be done with you present, but it is important that the peer partners communicate the results of the review in person.

## 2. What is the focus of the review?

Select the specific area you want peer reviewed and discuss this with your peer partner.

Focus on one or two key aspects of the area you have selected.

Use the prompt questions from this resource kit to stimulate thought about the area of your teaching you want reviewed.

Try and focus on one or two areas/issues and avoid looking too generally at your teaching.

## 3. Preparation

It is necessary to spend some time with your peer partner beforehand, discussing and agreeing on what is to be reviewed, the range and scope of the review and the aspects of your teaching you are seeking to address.

Documenting these early discussions will help keep peer partners focused and will help you both to reflect on the results.

- » **Think about “what is to be reviewed?” and “why do you want it to be reviewed?”. These two questions will impact your decision on “who” should be the reviewer.**
- » **Regardless of their level or discipline etc., you need to respect your peer partner.**
- » **This is a reciprocal process, so ensure you choose a partner who wishes to participate in their own review process with you as reviewer.**
- » **Remember, this partnership is built around learning conversations.**

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## 1. Should it be someone in my discipline?

Someone from inside your discipline will know the subject material, and look at content issues, but an outsider may give fresh perspectives and consider more general teaching approaches.

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

An outside person will bring fresh ideas, and you might learn new things from a new disciplinary approach.

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## 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, but remember this is a peer partnership.

Don't assume that someone more senior or junior can't be a 'peer'. Most people are relatively new to on-line teaching, and everyone can benefit from learning conversations focussing on reflection.

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

Someone you know might make discussion and communication easier. Of course it also might make them unwilling to critique your work. Feedback is provided through learning conversations which offer critique which is honest and positive, offered in an informal environment.

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## 4. Once I find a possible partner, how do I convince this person to participate?

This is a great opportunity for a colleague (friend/peer) to obtain some feedback on their teaching. You can teach them about the benefits of peer review and the benefits of learning conversations.

You can also let them know this might be useful in performance appraisal conversations, or in preparing for promotion or possible teaching awards. They get the same benefits as you!

- » **This is a reciprocal process in which peer partners stand to benefit as they explore aspects of each other's teaching.**
- » **Communication is critical to the reciprocal peer review process – be sure to keep your partner up to date with your peer review activities so they can respond appropriately.**
- » **You are asked to reflect on your process after the peer review to inform any changes/improvements.**
- » **Think about how this information will be shared during the life of the peer review and beyond.**

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## 1. Writing your reflective email

To get your review underway you need to write a reflective email for your peer review partner about what aspect of your teaching you would like to have reviewed, and why.

Share your email with your peer partner.

What other documentation is required to record your peer review activities?

Communicate with your peer partner to ensure you are both clear about the purpose of the review and how you intend to use the feedback.

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## 2. Learning conversations

After your peer partner has conducted the review you need to arrange a time for your learning conversation.

Use the Prompt Questions sheet to guide your learning conversation.

Focus on having a conversation rather than a discussion – it is important to ask questions and explore answers rather than provide knowledge or definitive explanations.

See the Learning Conversations sheet for guidance as to how to conduct this conversation.

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## 3. Reflection

An important part of the process is reflecting on your peer review experience and considering what you have learnt from the process.

This reflection can be an extension of your learning conversation or it can be an individual activity.

Depending on the purpose of your review, how might you now apply what you learned from your peer review and learning conversation?

What actions are you intending to take and how might you record and evaluate your activities?

## Prompt Questions for Peer Review

### 1. Administration and communication

Are face-to-face and online explanations clear? Are student interest and engagement encouraged?

Is communication responsive to students' understanding, ideas and progress in learning? Are students' communications and questions responded to effectively and in a timely way? Are assessment expectations, criteria and standards clearly communicated to students?

Is there clear guidance for students on the structure of online and blended resources and the choices that are available?

Is there effective co-ordination and communication with other staff teaching in the unit/subject? Are marking and grades well managed?

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### 2. Planning and preparation

Is the unit/subject content current, relevant and informed by research and current practice?

Are teaching and learning practices informed by scholarship and awareness of relevant innovations? Does preparation take students' previous knowledge and experience into account?

Are learning resources and online sites well structured and updated in a timely way? Where relevant, are there interactions with other professionals?

How has feedback been incorporated into the planning process?

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### 3. Design

What is the design?

Are the goals for students' learning clear?

Are the goals related to the needs of students and the role of the reviewed aspect(s) in the unit/subject (and, if relevant, the overall course)?

Is there a clear rationale for the design of the unit/subject/learning environment, including the chosen blend of learning opportunities?

How does the design address the characteristics of online and blended learning environments? Has there been collaboration with others in designing the course or unit?

Are learning and teaching methods and assessment aligned with learning outcomes?

### 3. Design, continued

Is there an appropriate level of intellectual challenge?

Do students have opportunities for choice and independent learning?

Do students have opportunities to relate what they are learning to broader contexts? Are learning innovations effective in achieving their goals?

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### 4. Teaching

Are students encouraged to see the connections between the parts of the unit/subject and the whole and to see how the whole unit/subject relates to the broader field of study?

Do students have opportunities to develop relevant 'generic' graduate attributes? Are students encouraged to engage actively in learning?

Do students have opportunities to interact, collaborate with and learn from others? Are intellectual challenge and support balanced?

Are student inquiry, creativity, problem solving and experimentation (relevant to the discipline) encouraged?

Are innovative or innovatively adapted methods used appropriately to offer new opportunities for learning?

Do teaching methods offer flexibility to respond to students' experiences, understandings and needs, and to changing situations?

Does teaching encourage students to interact with others and discuss, compare, develop and challenge ideas?

Is feedback on students' learning clear, effective and timely? Have students actively engaged in the unit/subject/ learning activities? Have students achieved the intended learning goals?

Is there evidence of other important or unexpected learning achievements?

Have you as teacher learned from students and adapted your teaching in response, during teaching and afterwards?

Has reflection been informed by a variety of sources, such as student feedback, student learning, peers and relevant literature?

Have reflection and feedback been acted on in order to improve outcomes?

## Providing Feedback Through Learning Conversations

### 1. Background

- This process seeks to encourage what is called “Peer-supported review (P-SR)” and the collaborative model of peer review (Gosling, 2009).
  - There is the view that once a development task such as peer review becomes a requirement (or formalised), the requirement for development is reduced, and this lessens the benefits of engagement in the process.
  - This module of peer review allows for collaborative dialogue (conversation) between peers rather than one peer giving feedback in a formal, structured way to the other.
  - This stage of the peer review process is the learning conversation stage.
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### 2. What is a learning conversation?

- A conversation between two professionals which can promote learning.
  - Both peers are equally open to learning about their teaching.
  - Underpinning this approach is the idea of a conversation that goes beyond an exchange of facts and ideas – a conversation that can transform these, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought (Zeldin, 1998) – a collaborative inquiry process.
  - There is also the idea of “reciprocity” – an opportunity for learning when both parties accept the peer review space that has been created as one for mutual or reciprocal learning.
  - Both peers are equally open to professional learning.
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### 3. Some approaches to a learning conversation

- Ask questions that stimulate reflection, exchange of ideas and information, but do not pass judgement or imply a judgement.
- There is no hierarchy – as peers you need to jointly construct and manage the conversation.
- This is a dialogue – peers are involved in exploration and critique of reasons and assumptions associated with their views.
- Participants take turns speaking, there is no pre-set order for roles, topics or turntaking.
- Storytelling is a common ingredient of a learning conversation.
- Permissiveness, openness, and risk taking should be encouraged through this process.
- While note taking is not always possible during a conversation, notes (in a learning journal/wiki etc.) can be made immediately after the conversation, inviting the peer to read the notes. Or you can record your notes.



- » **Think about the documentation you require for your peer review. It can consist of both formal and informal materials, including your reflections.**
- » **Consider how you might use these documents in your later reflection.**
- » **Discuss with your peer partner what documentation you may require from them.**

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## 1. What documentation will be produced?

A review can produce a range of documentation including:

- Your reflective email about your teaching, what you want reviewed, and the clear focus of that review (e.g. ability to engage all students)
- Your reflections about the process you are engaging with (in learning journal, wiki, etc.)
- Any notes you may have recorded after the learning conversation with your peer partner
- An action plan that identifies the peer partner's professional learning needs or other actions to be taken.

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## 2. How might this information be used?

It is up to the individual to decide how to use it and to whom to show it.

Some may decide to use it in a promotion application, for reflection on individual teaching and learning practice, or in applying for an award or grant. Others may decide not to show it to anyone and just use it to plan their own professional learning activities.

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## 3. How are the results communicated to the reviewee?

A very informal chat can happen directly after the peer review activities.

A more formal process could include a combination of email, face-to-face and virtual (online) meetings. These might occur prior to the review taking place or post-review.

It is important to consider the timing of the conversation and to ensure both peer partners are clear about this.

- » **What do you do once the peer review is completed?**
- » **You need to decide what use to make of the reviewer's comments.**
- » **Consider other actions you might like to take and what support you might need.**

### 1. Do we keep talking?

This may be an opportunity to start a longer term discussion about teaching in your school, discipline or faculty.

Think about doing more peer reviews in the future. Think about doing peer reviews with other people.

Peer review is only one way to assist in developing each other's teaching. What other things might you consider?

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?

Have you followed up on your peer partner's recommendations? Has the process made a difference?

Did it address the issue you started with?

Can you tell whether any changes made to your teaching are successful or not?

Do your students notice a difference? And does that always matter?

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

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 online or blended teaching? Make the focus broader or narrower?

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

You can assist colleagues who might be thinking of trying peer review, and participate in this with them.

You can disseminate findings from participation in this project across your school, discipline area, or university.

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

You might think about examining the literature in light of your experience, or even contributing to it by writing a scholarly article about your experiences.

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## Attribution

The majority of the materials in this resource kit are adapted from the PEER Model, Peer Review resources and Communications resources developed at Macquarie University and published at [https://staff.mq.edu.au/teaching/teaching\\_development/peer/peer-resources](https://staff.mq.edu.au/teaching/teaching_development/peer/peer-resources).

This resource kit is slightly adapted from the version published in the “*Final Report: Embedding a peer review culture in online and blended teaching and learning practice at two universities*” (2014) authored by Gail Wilson (Project Leader).

Prompt Questions for Peer Review are adapted from the “*Final Report: Peer review in online and blended learning environments*” (2011) authored by Jo McKenzie and Nicola Parker, published at [www.iml.uts.edu.au/peer-review](http://www.iml.uts.edu.au/peer-review).

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