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Peer Evaluation as an Effective Tool to Improve Twelfth-Grade Students' Writing

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Peer Evaluation as an Effective Tool to Improve Twelfth-Grade Students' Writing

By
Jenna R. Ebersviller

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree
In
Teaching and Learning

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Mankato, Minnesota

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This thesis is submitted as part of the required work in the Department of Educational Studies, K-12 and Secondary Programs, KSP 610, Scholarly Writing, at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and has been supervised, examined, and accepted by the professor.

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of peer evaluation on twenty-four twelfth-grade students' writing performance, attitudes, and information learned. Previous research revealed that peer evaluation improved students' writing; their experiences with peer evaluation were positive; and that through evaluating peers' writing, students were able to learn from one another. Both research groups made significant improvements from their first writing assignment, where no peer evaluation was used, to their second writing assignment, where thorough peer evaluation was used. The author concludes that the improvement in writing can be attributed to peer evaluation. Students' attitudes about peer evaluation throughout the process also improved.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Suburban students in twelfth grade courses need a writing intervention, not only for educational purposes, but also to learn how to effectively put their ideas into writing for personal use and college readiness. According to Conley (2005), students who thrive in entry-level university English classes are prepared for doing well in a variety of college courses. In order to do well in such courses, students must have a good grasp on writing conventions. Often times, students are not prepared for college writing, and they do not discover this until after their first writing class when they receive a C on a paper because their writing skills are weak (Conley, 2005). Inability to communicate effectively through writing will cause students to struggle personally and in college, especially with current technology advancements. Students will need to be able to organize their thoughts effectively in writing; regardless of whether it is an email, a writing assignment in a college course, or eventually, a product at work, it will be essential in effective communication. Specific writing experiences help students develop rhetorical knowledge, which is the basis of good writing (NCTE, 2008). According to the NCTE (2008) the development of rhetorical knowledge permits writers to have the ability to adapt to different contexts, purposes, and audiences. Developing these skills will assist students in a variety of university courses and beyond in their careers.

Gielen, Tops, Dochy, Onghena, & Smeets (2010) suggest that students become more diligent in their work when they learn that their peers will be reviewing it.

Crossman and Kite (2012) completed a study that focused on peer evaluation among a

group of heterogeneously grouped native and nonnative English speakers where face-to-face peer editing improved the quality of revised written work. With peer evaluation and feedback, students have the opportunity to review rubrics multiple times while writing their own papers and review their peers' work as well, which can help each student understand the concepts more fully. According to Phielix, Prins, & Kirschner (2010) and Yang (2010), students are able to see different perspectives and think and understand concepts more deeply through peer evaluation. Students learn from one another throughout the peer review process. They not only learn from the comments made by their peers, but they also learn by reading from another student's perspective (Sims, 1989). From the information gathered in studies from the literature as well as the performance of a small-scale experimental study, the focus will be on the importance of improving writing skills through practicing peer feedback to assure successful personal and college-bound communication through academic writing. The specific focus of this study will be on two College Prep and Composition classrooms comprised of twelfth graders, where students will be improving grammar skills and practicing effective writing through several writing assignments.

Statement of the Problem

Concise and effective written communication is a necessity at the university level and in the professional world. The poor proficiency in writing skills in the twelfth grade classroom is frightening, as only 24% of twelfth graders performed at or above a proficient level of writing (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003). Nearly 7,000 teens drop out of high school every school day. One of the reasons those students drop out is because they

lack basic literacy skills (Graham & Perin, 2007). The specific research questions are as follows:

1. How does peer evaluation influence students' writing skills in the classroom?
2. How does peer evaluation influence students' understanding of the information learned?
3. What are students' perceptions about preparation to write effectively for college-level courses following instruction using peer evaluation?
4. What part of peer evaluation do students value the most in the classroom?

Importance of the Study

The goal of this study is to provide meaningful instruction to students on how to effectively review and provide feedback to their peers' writing in the classroom. Writing is something students and professionals do every day. If individuals are unable to write effectively, personal and professional relationships will be affected negatively. The low percentage of students demonstrating proficiency in writing needs to be addressed. Writing effectively can improve communication skills in general. If the issue of writing proficiency is not solved, particularly with technology and online correspondence playing such a large role in today's world, these students will struggle to succeed professionally. Writing is a skill, and it also helps predict academic success and plays a substantial role in civic life and the global economy (Graham & Perin, 2007). In a world where the economy is already struggling and many are without jobs, it is essential that students improve their writing skills. Peer evaluation in writing will give students the opportunity to learn from one another through writing, and students will have an opportunity to look at the rubric multiple times to ensure their understanding (Crossman & Kite, 2012). Peer

evaluation is also versatile. It can involve the entire class reviewing one document, small groups working together on a document, or student-to-student review of each other's work. Also, when students write for the teacher, this only means they are writing for a grade (Holley, 1990). When students use peer review, they learn to write for multiple audiences. Students will also gain a sense of camaraderie in that they will enjoy reading and offering advice to peers' writing

When students are able to effectively organize their thoughts, put thoughts in writing, and then defend their ideas with specific examples, they will have developed the skills of analyzing a source and supporting their ideas with specific evidence. Evidence reported above indicates low rates for fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders in writing proficiency (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003). The numbers are shockingly low, especially since many of these students are graduating from high school and are continuing on to either a two- or four-year school. A potential solution to the writing proficiency issue is guided peer evaluation.

Methods

The researcher conducted a literature search pertaining to peer evaluation in the classroom, with the findings demonstrating an overall positive impact. Peer evaluation improves students' writing; the information students gain from peer evaluation increases versus a typical lecture and test class; students' attitudes about peer evaluation are overall positive; and students value being the evaluator in the peer evaluation process. All of the research gathered for this study was peer reviewed, with the majority of the sources dating within the past ten years.

The research design used for the proposed study was a qualitative case study. Methods of data collection were observations in the classroom, formal essays, and conferences with the students. Also, a college-readiness and peer evaluation process survey was used to gather data.

For the research questions defined in this study, different methods of data collection were used. One research question asks how peer evaluation influenced students' writing skills in the classroom. To determine these factors, the researcher had students complete an essay without any peer evaluation. Before the next essay was due, the researcher provided students with an instructional packet to train students in peer-evaluation and guided students through the process. Each day, the researcher would provide students with an example from the packet so students could become familiar with it. All essay grades pre- and post-instruction were recorded, analyzed, graphed, and coded.

Another research question asks how peer evaluation influences students' understanding of the information learned. To gather information about this question, the researcher conducted individual conferences with the students in the classroom where students would fix three conventional or writing process errors within one of their essays. The researcher began with a list of questions to ask the students, and then followed up with them based on their responses as the conference took place. Conferences were recorded, transcribed, and coded.

Other research questions ask what students' perceptions are about preparation for writing effectively in college-level courses following instruction using peer evaluation, and also, what parts of the peer evaluation process students value most in the classroom.

The researcher requested that students participate in a survey about college-readiness and writing and peer evaluation to gather data.

The data from this study was collected from a large suburban high school in the upper Midwest. The researcher used data collected from response essays from twenty-two twelfth-grade students to analyze the strengths and areas of improvement needed for each individual student. Throughout this process, interventions also included various grammar lessons involved with sentence structure, verb usage, and active and passive voice.

Overall, the researcher collected a variety of data including the following: daily, students corrected sentences from past student samples. Once this was complete, students went through the peer evaluation process, and after this, completed a conference with the teacher where they selected three sentences from their own writing, previously identified by the teacher, to verbally correct and re-write. Last, the students took a survey directly related to the peer evaluation process and focused on whether or not they feel better prepared for college-level writing. The researcher analyzed data by creating pre and post **charts** following the students' progress through the process of writing.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the study. The study was conducted using one group of 12th grade high school students within an upper Midwest, suburban school district. The results of the impact of peer evaluation are limited to its use in an English class. The researcher taught this group of high school students, so reliability is an issue involved in this study because the researcher has a relationship with the students. Generalizations to a larger population from a small-scale study should be used with care.

Definition of Terms

Peer review, peer feedback, peer evaluation

Peer review, feedback, and evaluation are intended to be used interchangeably. Peer evaluation is a term used widely in the education field for evaluating another individual's work that is of similar aptitude as the creator. Peer review has been accepted as the same meaning in the education world, but has multiple other meanings as well, so it is important to understand that it is meant to be the same as peer evaluation. Peer feedback is used in the same place as peer review or evaluation. Peer feedback is intended to be a more appealing way to say "peer evaluation" to students in the classroom, because often times, students' nerves take over when they hear the term *evaluation*.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

The NAEP is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in mathematics, reading, science, the arts, economics, writing, civics, U.S. history, geography, and eventually (in 2014), Technology and Engineering Literacy. NAEP focuses on subject-matter achievement, school environment, and instructional experiences for populations of students, not individual students or schools, although it can report results for large urban districts.

Literacy

Being able to read and write while thinking critically.

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The NCTE is devoted to improving the teaching and learning of English and the language arts at all levels of education.

Rhetorical Knowledge

The ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending text.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There are several studies (Jensen & Fischer, 2005; Cho & Cho, 2005; Lai, 2010, Al-Jamal, 2009; Crossman & Kite, 2012; Gielen, Lies, Filip, & Onghena, 2010; Kastr, Tollefson, Gilbert, 1987; Yang, 2010; Thomas, Martin, & Pleasants, 2011; Kelly, 2003; Ozogul & Sullivan, 2007; Todd & Hudson, 2007) that connect peer evaluation to a better overall learning environment for students. For example, Jensen and Fischer (2005) studied a group of students in a construction management program at the university level and found that students involved in the peer evaluation process of writing appeared to develop better written communication skills than their peers who only received feedback only from a teaching assistant and/or the instructor. Cho and Cho (2005) researched how offering comments on a peer's writing can help improve one's own writing. Gielen et al. (2010) explored whether or not peer feedback could substitute for teacher feedback as well as which measures could be taken to improve the effectiveness of peer feedback. They did this through having a pre-test and post-test experimental group including the Dutch writing exam in December and the final writing exam in June. In 2007, Ozogul and Sullivan investigated the effects of teacher, self, and peer evaluation on pre-service teachers in their study; however, they found that the teacher-evaluation group improved the pre-service teachers' lesson plans significantly more than the self and peer evaluation groups. Despite this, the students found the peer evaluation process to be a positive experience, and the researchers provided suggestions for further improvements of using peer evaluation in the classroom. Studies related to students' perceptions about

preparation for college writing following peer-evaluation sessions are not as readily available. Review of the current literature helps answer three of the research questions posed in this study and will help guide the organization of this literature review. The research questions are as follows:

1. How does peer evaluation influence students' writing skills in the classroom?
2. How does peer evaluation influence students' understanding of the information learned?
3. What are students' perceptions about preparation to write effectively for college-level courses following instruction using peer evaluation?
4. What part of peer evaluation do students value the most in the classroom?

The first part of the literature review will focus on peer evaluation's influence on students' writing skills and what students' perceptions are about preparation to write effectively for college-level courses following instruction using peer evaluation. In response to the question about how peer evaluation will influence students' understanding of the information learned, the second part of the literature review will focus on learning through peer feedback. Chapter Four will respond to the final research question about what parts of peer evaluation students value most. The literature review will conclude with a summary of main points and a discussion of the need for the research conducted in the present study.

Peer Evaluation, Writing, and Students' Perceptions

Research indicates (Jensen & Fischer, 2005; Cho & Cho, 2005; Lai, 2010; Al-Jamal, 2009; Crossman & Kite, 2012) that through peer evaluation, students produce better writing and perceive that their writing skills improved. Additionally, peer

feedback was deemed a helpful addition to the learning environment (Jensen & Fischer, 2005; Cho & Cho, 2005; Lai, 2010; Al-Jamal, 2009; Crossman & Kite, 2012). Studies related to writing skill improvement and students' perceptions are discussed in the following section of this literature review. If students understand what writing should look like and are provided opportunities to give and receive feedback on writing, their attitudes about writing will improve as well as their perceptions about the quality of their writing and the peer evaluation process.

Peer Evaluation Improves Writing Skills

Several studies (Cho & Cho, 2005; Lai, 2010; Al-Jamal, 2009; Crossman & Kite, 2012) relate improved writing skills to peer evaluation. Jensen and Fischer (2005) studied a group of students in a construction management program at the university level and found that students who were involved in the process of peer evaluation in writing developed better written communication skills than their peers who only received feedback from the instructor or the teaching assistant. This improvement does not simply come from students providing comments on strengths of their peers' writing; comments on weaknesses within writing also helped improve writing skills (Cho & Cho, 2005). Not only did comments directed at weaknesses improve writing, but according to Lai (2010), scores of students' written work showed their writing improved the most with peer evaluation specifically. In 2009, Al-Jamal found that students having the ability to respond to one another's writing in such a positive manner "enhanced the development of their writing skill" (p. 13). Also, face-to-face peer editing improves the quality of revised written work (Crossman and Kite, 2012). What these studies indicate is that peer review

improves written communication, both strengths and weaknesses of writing produce positive effects, and revised work improves; therefore, so did students' writing.

Students' Perceptions of Peer Evaluation Are Positive

A second area of investigation is whether students connected peer evaluation of writing to a positive classroom experience. Students found the received feedback helpful (Gielen, Lies, Filip, & Onghena, 2010) and valued both face-to-face and computer-generated evaluation of their writing (Lai, 2010). According to Wilkins, Shin, & Ainsworth (2009), students can gain confidence in their writing when they receive positive feedback from their peers; thus, their attitudes about the process of peer evaluation improve. Ozogul and Sullivan (2007) identify that because students felt that they were learning from their peers through peer evaluation that their attitudes about the process also became positive. In the study completed by Kastra, Tollefson, and Gilbert (1987), the researchers found that the students who were a part of the experimental group and participated in peer evaluation commented more frequently that they enjoyed sharing their writing with their peers and felt that their writing was improving. Kastra et al. (1987) even argue that students' attitudes about writing can be improved through performing peer evaluation in the classroom. These studies support Kastra et al.'s idea that students value peer evaluation as a tool to improve their writing.

Peer Evaluation and the Information Learned

Another area of investigation is how peer evaluation may provide students with a way to learn about content in class. Students learn content from their peers' work if given the opportunity to provide feedback to their peers in the classroom.

Research by Yang (2010); Thomas, Martin, and Pleasants (2011); Gielen, Lies, Filip, & Onghena (2010); Kelly (2003); Ozogul & Sullivan (2007); and Vickerman (2009) connects learning and peer evaluation. Yang (2010) indicates that, following peer evaluations, in students' final drafts, they included new information along with old information in their writing. When completing a study in an outdoor education classroom, Thomas, Martin, and Pleasants (2011) found that peer-assessment helped students learn more about outdoor leadership. Retention of learning is improved as indicated in one study that found that students providing feedback to one another had greater longer-term learning effects versus the traditional classroom lecture and testing method (Gielen, Lies, Filip, & Onghena, 2010, p. 157). Transfer of learning to new areas is also supported as was indicated in 2003, when Kelly stated, "I have seen students use many of the same skills that they have gained in the technical assignments while doing peer editing on more expressive and creative language arts assignments" (p. 375). Pre-service teachers indicated that reviewing a peer's lesson plan helped improve their own (Ozogul & Sullivan, 2007). Also, based on students' responses, students felt that they learned more about writing skills through peer feedback than they would have in a traditional lecture and testing classroom experience (Todd & Hudson, 2007). According to Vickerman (2009), a majority of students agreed that their knowledge about a given subject improved due to peer feedback. These studies reveal that peer evaluation provides another opportunity for students to extend learning. Students are able to read one another's work and provide feedback to peers. That feedback ultimately gives students the ability to critically think about the topic to provide an accurate response to the peer while extending their own learning.

Summary

Research examined in this literature review shows that peer evaluation is an important element in improving writing skills and increasing students' learning in the classroom. Also, students' attitudes towards peer evaluation and writing is positive, and that there is a constant cycle between practicing effective evaluation and improving students' attitudes. Studies involving writing, students' attitudes, and information learned suggest that peer evaluation is an effective classroom tool that supports student learning. While current research connects learning and writing improvement to peer evaluation, a gap in the research exists to explain students' perceptions on writing in college following the practice of using peer evaluation in a high school classroom. The present study aims to fill that gap in research. The purpose of this study is to understand how peer review and feedback influences the preparation of high school seniors for college-level writing.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In order to determine the effect of peer evaluation on student achievement in the classroom and whether or not students feel prepared to write at the college level, the researcher deemed it necessary to study twelfth-grade students in a college preparatory and composition course. This chapter outlines this research, including the sample, research context, and research design.

Chapter One listed four research questions that shaped the purpose of this study:

1. How does peer evaluation influence students' writing skills in the classroom?
2. How does peer evaluation influence students' understanding of the information learned?
3. What are students' perceptions about preparation to write effectively for college-level courses following instruction using peer evaluation?
4. What types of peer evaluation do students value the most in the classroom?

The literature review shed light on some of these questions. The research outlined below was designed to understand them in more detail.

Sample

Two classes of high school seniors, who were seventeen and eighteen years of age, were involved in this study. Prior to beginning the study, parental permission and student assent was obtained. Between both classes, the total number of students was 56. Of these 56 total students, 24 agreed to allow the researcher to use their classroom activities as a part of the research; however, only 22 students participated in all parts of the

research. The low percentage of students (42%) opting to be a part of the study group could be partly attributed to the timing of the study and the age of the students. Part of the study took place around the same time as homecoming celebrations at the high school, and many of the students involved are high school seniors who are athletes, cheerleaders, and big supporters of athletics within the school, so their focus and willingness to participate may have been affected during the week of homecoming festivities. The total sample of 24 students included fourteen girls and ten boys. Twenty-three students were Caucasian and one student, a female, was African-American. Five students from this sample were 18-years-old, and nineteen of the students were 17-years-old. All students were seniors in high school. The researcher had some prior knowledge of participants' ability in writing after teaching twelve of the participants in prior school years ranging from students' eighth grade year to their eleventh grade year. Of those twelve students, the researcher had three of the students during their tenth grade year, and two of them during their eleventh grade year. The researcher taught the remaining seven students prior to their sophomore year in high school. All students participated in activities of the study as a part of regular classroom activities, but the researcher only collected data from students who granted the researcher permission to do so.

Research Context

The research was conducted at an upper Midwest suburban high school with a student population of 2,412 students. The school is one of the top ten largest high schools in the state. The class is an English composition class for seniors who are preparing to attend college. The students in this school are required to take a full year of English their senior year, but they can elect which English courses to take. The students in this composition

course range from low to high achieving, as some students come from general-level English courses, and others, from advanced placement English courses in prior school years. Before beginning the study, students selected the group members with whom they would be working periodically throughout the peer evaluation process. The teacher also walked students through the peer evaluation process prior to the first official peer evaluation in the classroom to increase students' familiarity with the process, because "as familiarity grows with the assessment tool, students' preferences will change positively, and...students' perceptions of the appropriateness of the assessment method will be congruent with their preferences" (Struyven, Dochy, & Janssens, 2010). Only studies with similar samples and contexts will be able to generalize the results from this study. Generally speaking, samples with less than 30 participants make it difficult to achieve statistical significance.

Research Design

Students participated in the peer evaluation process two times during the data collection. The first time was for practice and was guided by the teacher to increase familiarity with the process. Students read an anonymous writer's essay and evaluated it according to the same process that they would be using to provide feedback to one another at a later time. Since students completed this first peer evaluation session simply to increase familiarity with the process, there are no results from this activity. During the peer evaluation session, students read one another's writing and answered questions about their peer group members' writing (Appendix A). Each time, students completed a packet containing three parts after reading their group members' writing. The first part included the peer evaluation form. Students completed a peer evaluation form for each group

member; this was completed prior to the peer evaluation session, and included identifying three strengths and three areas of improvement with examples for each. On this same form, students wrote one goal for themselves for their final copy. Next, students completed a peer evaluation summary form, which gave them a chance to process their feedback from their peers regarding their paper. Last, students completed a self-reflective form once they completed their final copy. All documents were submitted with the final copy. The following are the writing assignments, in order:

1. Writing Assignment Topic 1: Students wrote about a past writing experience, positive or negative. This particular writing assignment did not include peer evaluation, as this was the control paper. The researcher would later use the results from this paper and compare them to the results of the final writing assignment: the process essay. There was no peer evaluation completed with this writing assignment.
2. Writing Assignment Topic 2: This assignment was to write a process essay. Students were to write an essay providing step-by-step instructions on how to do something such as write an essay or have a successful first hunting experience. During the peer evaluation sessions, pre-determined questions were used so students would become familiar and comfortable with the process (Appendix B). Observational field notes were taken while participants completed peer evaluations in the classroom. During peer evaluation observations, the researcher told the class one thing the researcher would be looking for in their writing on that particular day. For example, for the second peer evaluation, where students wrote a process essay, the researcher walked around to the different groups and let the

students know that she was looking for organization within their writing. The students always knew before they began their peer evaluation what the researcher was focusing on for the day so that they, too, could focus on this while editing one another's writing. The researcher also noted students' understanding of the peer evaluation process and their thoroughness of completion.

As a daily activity, students also completed daily grammar and mechanics sessions. During grammar and mechanics observations, the teacher provided students with past students' writing samples (one sentence at a time) that had various grammatical or mechanical errors in them (Appendix C). The researcher gave the students an opportunity to work with a partner to rewrite the sentence so that it was grammatically and mechanically sound. Students needed to identify which grammar or mechanics rule applied to each edit they made within the sentence. Students would write potential corrections on the Smart Board, and then the researcher collected all of the students' corrections and analyzed the research group's corrections thoroughly following a brief discussion of potential corrections within the sentences. These grammatical and mechanical observations lasted about 25 minutes per class period throughout the data collection process. All throughout this time, the researcher took notes and observed the following (Appendix D):

- Were students able to identify problem areas in the provided sentences?
- Were students able to do this without help from the teacher/researcher?
- Were students able to correct sentences so they were grammatically and mechanically sound?

- Were students able to not only correct sentences, but also say what rules applied to the correction(s)? For example, it was a run-on sentence or the subject and verb did not agree.

The researcher also identified any students who seemed to struggle with the lesson, flew through it because it was too simple, any students who were very involved with the lesson, and any interesting observations about the sentence corrections that day, such as someone was more/less involved than usual. Also, the researcher noted any students who needed more guidance that day or any connections to everyday life.

Upon completion of the peer evaluation sessions, students participated in conferences with the researcher one time during data collection within the class time. During the one-to-one conferences, students brought with them five sentences that the teacher/researcher selected from the students own writing to correct. From the five sentences, the student selected three to correct as the teacher observed and took notes. The conference lasted about ten minutes, and began with general questions about corrections needing to be made in the student's writing, but periodically changed depending on how the student was responding to the questions and correcting errors.

Lastly, students took one exploratory survey upon completion of the study responding to their readiness for postsecondary writing and the peer evaluation process. Some statements referred to whether or not students were comfortable with writing a very clear and well-organized paper, whether or not students felt they had learned about writing and about themselves from the writing assignments, whether or not students felt they had improved in various areas of their writing since their first writing experience, and also, whether or not they felt ready to write for college courses. A copy of the survey

questions is included in in the appendix (Appendix E). The findings of these research activities will be discussed in the next chapter, and in chapter five, suggestions for increasing validity of the writing and college readiness survey (Appendix E) will be made.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The activities participants performed as a part of this study provided the researcher with data to use when answering the research questions. In this chapter, results for each research activity will be discussed to indicate how the result answered specific research questions. Further applications and conclusions that can be made based upon the data will be discussed in the final chapter.

The students were asked to provide two academic writing samples. Their very first writing sample was the writing experience essay, and this was completed without the researcher introducing any peer evaluation activities. The second writing sample was the process essay, which was completed two weeks later, after students were able to practice peer evaluation of writing as well as grammar and mechanics activities. The mean score for females on the writing experience essay was 82.86%, and for males, 78.75%. The mean score for females on the process essay was 87.86% and males 82.5%. This resulted in a five percent increase in score for females and 3.75% increase for males, which is in response to research question one that queried how peer evaluation influences students' writing skills in the classroom. The changes in the overall mean score on the pre- and post-samples are reported in the following table.

Table 4.1

Writing Assignment Scores

Assignment	Number of Students (<i>n</i>) Who Took the Assessment	Mean Student Score (%)	Standard Deviation (%)
Writing Assignment 1: Writing Experience Essay	22	81.36%	7.10%
Writing Assignment 2: Process Essay	22	85.91%	8.16%
<i>Change in Scores</i>			
From Writing Assignment 1 to	22	4.55%	N/A

Writing

Assignment 2

The results provide information about twenty-two students' scores on the two writing assignments completed during this study. The first writing assignment's mean score, where students were to write about a past writing experience, shows students' writing ability prior to giving and receiving peer feedback in a peer evaluation session. The second writing assignment's mean score, where students wrote a process essay, shows students' writing ability after giving and receiving peer feedback in an extensive peer evaluation session. Table 4.1 shows students' scores increased from their first writing assignment to their second. The total amount of students involved in the study was twenty-four; however, one student, a female, did not complete the first writing assignment, and another, a male student, did not complete the second writing assignment. Thus, their scores were not included in this part of the data collection.

Students were also asked to complete grammar and mechanics corrections on sentences provided in class, which led to one-on-one conferences with the researcher. The sentences' errors ranged from subject and verb agreement to simple spelling errors and run-on sentences or sentence fragments. Students completed four grammar and mechanics sessions as a large group, beginning immediately after the first writing assignment that students completed, and ending right after the second writing assignment. Both of these writing assignments were the assignments that were a part of the data collection. Participants turned in their corrections of the sentences provided in class to the teacher to be analyzed and later compared to students' one-on-one conferences with the teacher. These large group sessions, where students were encouraged to collaborate with their peers, were in preparation for the one-on-one conference with the researcher, where the researcher could identify students' understanding of grammar rules for writing.

Part of the expectation in class was that students would take the information they learned from the grammar and mechanics corrections and discussions in class, and use it to help one another improve on those writing errors. Following the four sessions with large-group sentence corrections, students then completed the one-on-one conference with the teacher, where they were given the opportunity to show what they learned by correcting their own sentences from their first writing assignment. All 20 students who participated in the one-on-one conference with the researcher were able to identify any run-on sentences or sentence fragments within the three sentences that they corrected. All students were also able to fix punctuation errors as well as pronoun agreement errors. Many students seemed nervous during their conference with the teacher, which was surprising because they all had the questions that would be asked beforehand (Appendix B), so nothing was a surprise. Questions five and seven on the exploratory survey, which were, *within your three samples, do any of the sentences seem to show your voice? If so, which one(s), if not, how can you add voice?* and *choose one sentence to identify all parts of speech, i.e. noun, adjective, adverb, verb, preposition, etc. Please speak out loud as you are identifying words* proved to be unrelated to the research. This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Following the one-on-one conference with the researcher and after completion of both writing assignments, students were given the opportunity to express their opinions on the peer evaluation process using a Likert-type scale survey. The survey included 15 total questions, with two of those questions being open-ended to provide students with the opportunity to expand on their opinions. Table 4.2 displays the results of the survey,

including the mean score out of seven, the standard deviation for the question and the nearest response corresponding with the mean score.

Table 4.2

Student Survey About Attitudes Towards Peer Evaluation, Writing, and College Readiness

Survey Question	Number of Students (<i>n</i>) Who Took the Survey	Mean Student Score	Standard Deviation	Nearest Response
I am convinced that I eventually master concepts in writing that initially might be difficult to understand.	22	5.09	1.51	Fairly Strong Agreement
I feel confident in my grammar and mechanics in writing, both in English class and my other academic courses.	22	5	1.23	Fairly Strong Agreement
I am very comfortable writing a very clear and well-organized paper.	22	5.59	1.10	Fairly Strong Agreement

I know the difference between a research paper and an essay.	22	6.09	1.06	Strong Agreement
I know how to write a topic sentence and an outline.	22	6.32	.89	Strong Agreement
I feel I have learned about writing and about myself from the writing assignments.	22	5.59	1.14	Fairly Strong Agreement
I feel I have learned about writing and about myself from the peer evaluation process.	22	4.86	1.78	Partial Agreement
I have improved in various areas in my writing since our first writing assignment.	22	5.5	1.14	Fairly Strong Agreement
I am confident in my group members' ability to assess my papers during our peer	22	4.45	1.87	Partial Agreement

evaluation sessions.

I know the importance of a thesis in a paper.	22	6.41	.67	Strong Agreement
I know the difference between active and passive voice.	22	4.41	2.02	Partial Agreement
Overall, the peer evaluation process was a positive experience.	22	4.73	1.83	Partial Agreement
I feel I am ready to write for college courses.	22	5.41	.91	Fairly Strong Agreement

Open-Ended Response to Prior Beliefs About Peer Evaluation

Survey Question

What did you feel about peer evaluation prior to this class? And now?	All of the students who feel positively about peer evaluation now (63.64%), did not like peer evaluation prior to this class.
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Open-Ended Response to Likes/Dislikes of Peer Evaluation Sessions in this Class

Survey Question

Overall comments on the peer evaluation sessions (what were your favorite parts? What didn't you like? What do you think could be improved?)

Students seemed to really appreciate several parts of the peer evaluation sessions, including when their group members needed to identify strengths as well as weaknesses.

The majority of students (63.64%) did not like or were indifferent about peer evaluation prior to practicing it in this course, and now, they enjoy giving and receiving feedback from their peers. Some students even felt threatened by peer evaluation prior to this class because, as one student wrote, “I hated peer evaluation because I was nervous and didn’t want people to read my paper. I was also not confident in my writing and didn’t want to hear all of the negative feedback.” She later goes on to say that she now enjoys peer evaluation much more because she understands that it can help her become a better writer. Another student wrote that she thought peer evaluation was a hassle prior to this class even though she liked it. She went on to write, “Now, I am so thankful for these sessions.” One of the top students in the class wrote, “I thought [peer evaluation] was going to be a waste of time. I now have an appreciation for it because it has really helped my writing.” In response to the third research question that asked whether or not students felt prepared for writing in college after practicing peer evaluation in the classroom, students’ nearest response to this question was a fairly strong agreement (5.41). In response to the second open-ended question about students’ overall thoughts about peer evaluation and their favorite part about it, which is in response to the last research question, of the 14 students who enjoyed evaluating their peers, all of the students appreciated receiving feedback from their peers. Interestingly, only one student out of the 22 in the research group actually mentioned that she enjoyed giving feedback to other students versus just receiving it. She felt she learned more by providing feedback, which is a topic that will be discussed in future research in the next chapter. Another interesting part about this survey relates to the Likert-type scale question where students were to identify whether or not they felt the peer evaluation process was a positive experience,

again, in response to research question three related to students' perceptions. The score here indicates that all 22 students were merely in partial agreement here, with a score of 4.73, which is different than students indicated in the open-ended questions where the majority of students expressed overall that they enjoyed the process. The discrepancy can simply be related to the wording of the open-ended question versus the wording of the Likert-type survey question. The Likert-type survey question asks about the overall peer evaluation process. The word *overall* could imply to some students that the teacher is asking about group members being engaged; following directions; providing accurate, helpful feedback; etc. Also, each student defines the word *positive* differently. Because of this, these questions are asking two different things, even though they might seem very similar. This survey could be improved by breaking down both of these Likert-type scale questions into two sections; i.e., *the group part of the peer evaluation process was effective and this was shown through thought-provoking, thorough comments provided to me by my group members; and the questions and directions in the peer evaluation packet were directly related to expectations of the paper, which can be shown by connecting the rubric for the writing assignment to the comments that my teacher made on my paper to the peer evaluation packet that my group members filled out for me.* Rewording these questions will eliminate any confusion in the questions' meanings.

The results of this study provided insight to students' writing ability and information learned following peer evaluation, students' perceptions and attitudes on the peer evaluation process, along with which parts of the peer evaluation process students valued most. An important consideration is the validity of all of the data collected. Based on the research, two specific essential elements in peer evaluation ought to be

helping students define good qualities as well as weaknesses of writing. Discussions of these results and conclusions about how these results can lead to further research will take place in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

One of the purposes of this study was to explore the relationship between peer evaluation, learning, and students' writing and perceptions about peer evaluation in a college preparatory composition course. Four questions, described in Chapter One, provided the basis for this research, and the results of this research were described in Chapter Four. Conclusions that can be made based on the results will be discussed in this chapter. The chapter will conclude with a review of limitations and suggestions for future research.

The first question focused on how peer evaluation influenced students' writing in the classroom. Research says that between 24 and 31 percent of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 were proficient in writing (Persky, Daan, & Jin, 2002), which indicates that students are in need of a writing intervention. This study suggests that peer evaluation is a potential activity that can be used in the classroom to help students improve their writing. As this study indicates, it is important to have a very thorough process for students to complete as peer evaluators. It is clear that, for this particular small-scale study, peer evaluation played a role in helping students write better.

Another research question focused on how peer evaluation influences the information learned. Research indicated that students learn through the process of evaluating their peers (Yang, 2010; Thomas, Martin, and Pleasants, 2011; Gielen, Lies, Filip, & Onghena, 2010; Kelly, 2003; Ozogul & Sullivan, 2007; Vickerman, 2009; and Wilkins, Shin, & Ainsworth, 2009). The results of this study concur with the research.

Students learned from the writing rules discussed in this class, which showed in their second writing assignment as well as in their conferences with the researcher. Not only did students' overall scores increase in their writing, but during their one-on-one conference with the researcher, students were also able to make corrections that they otherwise struggled with during the large-group grammar and mechanics correction sessions. The researcher identified two questions, question five and question seven, that were unrelated to the research; thus, they could be eliminated. If not eliminated, the researcher would need to triangulate the information with the other research to add validity.

The third and fourth research questions were about students' perceptions about peer evaluation and whether or not they felt more prepared to write in college, along with what part of peer evaluation students valued most. The researcher chose the questions on this exploratory survey because they related to the research. The most valid responses were from the following statements within the Likert-type scale: *I feel I have learned about writing and about myself from the peer evaluation process; I have improved in various areas in my writing since our first writing assignment; overall, the peer evaluation process was a positive experience; I feel I am ready to write for college courses*; and from one of the free-response questions: *What did you feel about peer evaluation prior to this class? And now?* Students reported a positive experience with peer evaluation, with many of them indicating that they valued this process more than experiences they had completed in previous years in the free-response question. Of all of the participants, it was interesting that only one student indicated that she felt that she got

more out of providing feedback versus receiving feedback. This particular student also has the highest grade in the course, and when she was in tenth grade, took Pre-Advanced Placement English. Her writing is well above many of her classmates'; however, she felt that providing the feedback helped her writing improve. The feedback she gave to her peers impacted them as well, because their grades dramatically increased after their peer evaluation session, and this student ended up with a 100% on the second writing assignment. Although the open-ended questions indicated that this peer evaluation experience for participants was positive, on the Likert-type scale part of the survey, even students who may have really felt that certain parts of peer evaluation were beneficial, the whole experience itself may not have been as positive since there was only partial agreement that students' overall experience with peer evaluation being positive. In the previous chapter, the researcher identified one potential possibility for why this is: the wording of the questions needs to be adjusted so the questions are more specific and provide examples to students about how they would decide on their responses. The researcher can break the question down to be more specific and meaningful to the students.

The present study proposes that peer evaluation is an effective way to help students improve their writing in preparation for college. Results suggest that students were, at first, very hesitant of the process of peer evaluation; but, after their comfort level with the process increased, their attitudes towards peer evaluation improved. This information should be used as a guide for teachers to use peer evaluation with caution because many students' pre-conceived notions about peer evaluation can make the

process more challenging if not done with thorough consideration on how to actually carry out the process in any given class.

Study Limitations

This study provides some evidence that peer evaluation can be an effective tool to help students improve their writing; and, even if some students might not feel extremely confident in this area, according to the teacher, peer evaluation can also help students better prepare for writing in college. This study also indicated that students could learn while providing feedback to their peers. However, this research does contain certain limitations that should be considered when generalizing the data. First, the twenty-four twelfth-grade students who participated in the research are not a wide representation of all twelfth-grade students. As students in a large-sized, suburban school, the study was conducted using a homogenous sample of students based on convenience and willingness to participate. Because of this being a small-scale study, it cannot be generalized to large populations of students, and care should be taken before generalizing the information to students in urban settings in particular.

Future Research

Further studies regarding peer evaluation and students' writing ability, students' learning through peer evaluation, as well as students' preparation for college writing by practicing peer evaluation would be valuable in the future. Current research indicates that peer evaluation is an overall positive experience in the classroom, and if students are given the opportunity to provide thorough feedback to their peers, together, students can improve their writing and learn from one another. Another area to research would be whether or not students learn more from providing feedback to others versus receiving

feedback from others. This could be a new question to include in the Likert-type survey. The researcher found several questions on the exploratory survey that did not relate directly to the research; therefore, they should be eliminated. Questions 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 11 should all be removed from this survey because those questions did not pertain to the research gathered. The survey questions should be evaluated for construct validity and reliability in pilot studies prior to more extensive use. Longitudinal studies that track the students' progression through an entire school year as students evolve in their writing ability would provide more insight into how peer evaluation improves students' writing. Also, the researcher might consider triangulating the research using the various instruments in the study to increase validity. Studies completed with a larger sample size or in an urban setting could provide more generalizable results. It will also be important to research the steps needed to effectively implement and practice peer evaluation in the classroom. These additional studies would also benefit students and teachers.

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Appendix A - College Prep Composition – Peer Evaluation Packet

This packet of forms consists of the following:

1. Peer Evaluation Forms (3 pages): These forms are to be filled out **prior** to the peer evaluation session. You will fill this out based on your review of your group members' essays. We will break down into groups of three or four and you will verbally go over your responses on the form, and then after you've finished, you will give the writer your completed peer evaluation form for his or her paper. The group members should, in turn, give you their completed form once they have discussed their comments with you. At the end of the session, you should have received a completed peer evaluation form from each of the other members within the group.

After the Peer Evaluation Session

2. Peer Evaluation Summary Form: Once you've received the peer evaluation forms from the other members in your group, you will then complete this summary form using the information you've received (all the comments and suggestions made by the various group members) during the Peer Evaluation Session. On this form, you will also include your evaluative comments regarding the Peer Evaluation process.

3. Self-Reflective Form: On this form, you will answer some reflective questions about your writing and what you've learned through this process.

This completed packet is to be turned in with the final draft. Please drop this off in my classroom on Friday, September 20th.

Peer Evaluation Form (pg. 1 of 3)

Name of
Writer _____

Writing Assignment:

Editor/Reviewer (Your Name):

List three strengths of the paper and provide an example from the essay.

1.

Ex.

2.

Ex.

3.

Ex.

List three areas of improvement and provide an example from the essay.

1.

Ex.

2.

Ex.

3.

Ex.

Peer Evaluation Form (pg. 2 of 3)

1. Does the first paragraph include a thesis statement? _____ Yes _____ No

Underline the thesis statement. Do you have a clear picture of where the paper is going from the thesis?

Comments:

2. Does the first paragraph also include a preview of the points the paper will use to support the thesis statement?

Comments:

3. Underline the topic sentence for each paragraph. Do these topic sentences clearly link back to the thesis statement and preview of main points in the first paragraph?

What suggestions do you have for the structure—the order of the main points as shown by the topic sentences?

4. Review each paragraph. Does each paragraph include specific, concrete examples to help you visualize what it is that your peer is describing and do those examples both support the topic sentence and advance the thesis statement?

Comments and suggestions:

5. Read the concluding paragraph. Does it summarize the main points and link back to the thesis statement?

Comments and suggestions:

Peer Evaluation Form (pg. 3 of 3)

6. Is the writing style appropriate for you—the audience? The paper should be interesting to read, provide necessary background, and be written at an appropriate level for a college student to read.

Comments and suggestions:

7. Do you see any problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling, or any other writing conventions? The paper should be written in standard formal English. Highlight these issues and write suggestions on the paper itself. Be sure to indicate the “rule” they did not follow, i.e., “subject and verb do not agree.”

Tips: Look for subject/verb agreement, pronoun use and clarification, word choice, etc.

Peer Evaluation Summary Form

Answer the following questions. Your responses should be in complete sentences. In addition, your responses should indicate that time and effort went into them. The peer evaluation forms that were completed by the other members about your paper should be stapled to this form and to your rough draft.

- What was some of the positive feedback you received on your paper?

- What areas of the paper (if any) did the group feel contained unanswered questions?

- What areas of the paper (if any) did the group feel needed improvement?

- Did you agree or disagree with the group's assessment of the paper? Why or why not? Explain.

- Based upon the above feedback, what changes or alterations (if any) do you plan to do to your paper?

- Do you have any suggestions how the peer evaluation sessions could be improved? (Either give at least one suggestion or state why you think the peer evaluation session worked so well)

Goal setting: This will be discussed with the teacher prior to the final copy. Based on the feedback from the editor(s), set **one** goal for your final copy. The goal should represent an area that will have the greatest impact on your essay.

Goal _____

_____.

Student Signature _____ Teacher
Signature _____

Self-Reflective Form

Once you have completed the peer evaluation session and have revised the paper (constructing your final draft), please take the time to answer the following questions.

1. Do you feel that you've accomplished the goals you had written down at the beginning of this process? Why or why not? Explain. (Include in your discussion examples from at least two places within the paper)

2. What do you feel are the paper's strengths? Its weaknesses? (include examples)

3. Did you discover any areas in your writing (or in the writing process) where you need to improve? If so, where? Explain.

4. What have you learned about writing or about yourself as a writer from this assignment?

Appendix B - Conferences with Students

This conference will last approximately ten minutes long. I will be providing you with five sentences from your third writing sample, all of which need correcting. You will correct three of those five. Your questions during the conference will all start out the same, and then may adjust as the conference continues depending on how you are explaining your questions to me.

First, choose your three sentences and highlight them so I am aware of which ones you will be correcting. Then, read through the questions below to help you prepare for our conference.

During your conference, I will ask you the following questions. Remember, we will start with these questions and they may change as we go along depending on your writing sample. Be sure to bring your highlighted sentences along with you to your conference. Remember that at any point you may stop and we can end the conference.

Beginning Conference Questions

1. Within your three samples, are any of them run-on sentences? If yes, which one(s)? How will you fix them? Please describe what you are correcting as you are correcting it and why. If no, move on to the next question.
2. Within your three samples, do any of them have grammatical errors? If yes, what is/are the error(s)? If no, move on to question three.
3. Within your three sentences, do you use any second person? If so, underline it.
4. Within your three samples, do your subjects and verbs agree? Yes or no, please underline your subject once and your verb(s) twice.
5. Within your three samples, do any of the sentences seem to show your voice? If so, which one(s), if not, how can you add voice?
6. Within your three sentences, are there any punctuation errors? If so, what are they? If not, move on to the next question.
7. Choose one sentence to identify all parts of speech, i.e. noun, adjective, adverb, verb, preposition, etc. Please speak out loud as you are identifying words.
8. Identify any pronouns that lack clarification in any of your three sentences. If there are none, then move on to the next question.
9. Within your three samples, do you have any capitalization errors? If so, identify them and fix them.

Appendix C – Grammar and Mechanics Sentences – These are student sample sentences from past essays in this class. All of these sentences have errors that range from capitalization and punctuation to run-on sentences and subject-verb agreement. Each day, I will put one to two sentences on the SmartBoard, and your job is to work with someone near you to correct it on paper first, and then head up to the SmartBoard and correct it. I want you to do this with as little amount of change to the sentence as possible. Once the whole class is satisfied and there are several potential sentence corrections on the board, I will go over the answers and explain exactly what in the sentence was incorrect.

1. The Earliest writing experience I have is from when I was in Kindergarten.
2. I felt I did a very good job on it.
3. I mean look at what imp typing right now, it's going to be the same length and it's easy as pie!
4. Just like sophomore year when I received another paper.
5. Which is in writing just about every thing.
6. I also notice I seem to repeat things a lot and my papers are never really very detailed or descriptive.
7. I had to write a paper on "Dances with wolves".
8. My punctuations are not well made and correct most of the time.
9. I isolated myself from the world for almost 2 months.
10. Then of course site them correctly.
11. With bigger essays, I hope to have better time management skills and using that time to make whatever I am writing the best possible.
12. When I was younger, I had always loved to write for whatever reasons.

13. To me, your writing is always going to change whether it's for the better or worse....
14. And then when I do find stuff to put down on paper it doesn't always make sense.
15. My teacher (Mrs. Gross) always made us do D.O.L. (daily oral language) exercises every day.
16., because up till that time I was putting a period after every word.
17. Those kinds of papers make writing so enjoyable for me because you have a final decision of what happens.
18. I know this class will be challenging but I hope it pays off in the future.
19. It was one of those books where as your reading you would have to make decisions and see if you survived it.
20. For all of my AP tests, I practiced writing essays many times and I ended up getting very good and it was because of my essays.
21. The assignment was to write a research paper about our favorite animal, I chose to write about cheetahs.
22. In my early years of school that is when my writing experience began.
23. I had a certain writing experience that I will never forget, and that was when I was in first grade, that I somehow have never forgotten about.
24. My first writing experience was learning how to write my name in first grade. Obviously this was a big step when you are that young.
25. Writing is a very important thing in every kid's life and it continues to be important for basically the rest of schooling and eventually their career.

26. Add in that Frank was thirty feet tall in the story.

27. Writing is one of the greatest ways to express yourself and your experiences.

Appendix D – Grammar and Mechanics Observations - These observations will happen any class period that the class practices grammar and mechanics. Each time, the teacher/researcher will be taking notes including, but not limited to, the following:

- Yes No Were students able to identify problem areas in the provided sentences?
- Yes No Were students able to do this without help from the teacher/researcher?
- Yes No Were students able to correct sentences so they were grammatically and mechanically sound?
- Yes No Were students able to not only correct sentences, but also say what rules applied to the correction(s)? For example, it was a run-on sentence or the subject and verb did not agree.

Students who seemed to struggle today.

Students who flew through this because it was too easy.

Students who were really involved today.

Any interesting observations about sentence corrections today, i.e. someone more/less involved than normal, students needing more guidance today, connection to everyday life?

Appendix E – Peer Evaluation and College Readiness Survey

Answer each question as spontaneously and naturally as you can, without spending a lot of time on any particular one. Some of these questions may look familiar. Answer each question by highlighting one number from the following rating scale:

RATING SCALE

NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

Thus, if you agree completely with a statement, you should answer with a “7.” Agreement that is fairly strong but not total is indicated by selecting a “5,” while agreement that is fairly weak is indicated by “3.” Total disagreement is indicated by selecting “1.”

I am convinced that I eventually master concepts in writing that initially might be difficult to understand.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
I feel confident in my grammar and mechanics in writing, both in English class and my other academic courses.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
I am very comfortable writing a very clear and well-organized paper.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
I know the difference between a research paper and an essay.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
I know how to write a topic sentence and an outline.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
I feel I have learned about writing and about myself from the writing assignments.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
I feel I have learned about writing and about myself from the peer evaluation process.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
I have improved in various areas in my writing since our first writing assignment.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
I am confident in my group members' ability to assess my papers during our peer evaluation sessions.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
I know the importance of a thesis in a paper.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
I know the difference between active and passive voice.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
Overall, the peer evaluation process was a positive experience.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

I feel I am ready to write for college courses.	NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE
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Overall comments on the peer evaluation sessions (what were your favorite parts? What didn't you like? What do you think could be improved?):

What did you feel about peer evaluation prior to this class? And now?