

SWEETLAND DISSERTATION WRITING GROUPS

GROUP LEADER GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATING WORKSHOPS

As a group leader, you are in charge of the logistics for peer review workshops. The following guidelines should help you prepare for and execute peer review workshops. These guidelines work well in conjunction with the document “Workshop_Guidelines.”

As a leader of your group, the first item you should consider is setting up a calendar for workshops. Having a set calendar for meetings creates deadlines that might help writers in their creative process. Once you have this calendar, possibly 2 weeks after the mandatory orientation meeting, please send a copy to Louis Ciccirelli and Simone Sessolo. This copy will allow Louis and Simone to follow your progress and help you along the way.

Preparing for the workshop

You first need to decide what role writer and readers will play during the workshop: will the writer have 5 minutes at the beginning to introduce the chapter and remind the readers of his/her concerns? Will the writer stay mostly silent during workshop? These are things you will negotiate with your group, but you should remind your peers in advance about how the workshop will develop.

You should plan on workshopping only ONE writer per 60 minutes, since that time allows for extensive, targeted, and constructive feedback. You can also decide the order readers will follow in giving their feedback.

About 5 days before the workshop, you should remind the writer to circulate their chapter, if they haven't done so already. You should also make sure that every group member has received the chapter to be workshopped.

Remind readers to use the document “Feedback_Letter” to draft their feedback. That document guarantees equal feedback from group members. It is important that you account for readers' critiques so that group members will see this work as integral to the dissertation writing group. Please let Louis or Simone know if you need any help with that.

Remember that, most of all, you are a reader as well (or a writer if it is your turn).

Discussing workshop values and goals with your group members

Soon after you are acquainted with your group members, possibly during your first meeting, discuss with your group members what makes a workshop successful. Remind your group members of the positive aspects of interdisciplinary feedback. One important aspect to touch upon is that academia, and many other professional outlets, are based on interdisciplinarity. If your goal is to apply for a job in academia, then you will have to practice this kind of interdisciplinary exchange, and the dissertation writing groups offer you an avenue for such practice.

During your first meeting it is also a good idea to assess expectations. You might consider asking your group members what they would like out of the workshop, or what they consider less desirable, to create an open dialogue about the shared values of the workshop. The following are some of the attributes of an effective workshop that you might emphasize during the meeting:

- Readers should begin their feedback with positive traits so that writers can know what they have done well and what their strengths are. These positive traits work as templates for writers--they allow writers to know what works well in their writing.
- Readers should offer respectful, but brave, feedback. It must be clear that feedback comes from a positing of caring, even when that feedback is critical. While readers and writers should be mindful of disciplinary differences, focus on how these disciplinary differences might enhance your writing process and benefit you in the long run, for your academic and professional careers.
- Readers should focus on global concerns, taking inspiration from the list they can find in "Workshop_Guidelines."

With your group members, you should also decide what role you would like writers to play during the workshop. In reader-response workshops, the writer is usually instructed to remain quiet and take notes so that readers can share their feedback without interference from the writer's perspective until the end of workshop, when the writer can ask questions. However, you might choose for the writer to be more active in their own workshop and allow them to ask questions about their chapter either at the start or throughout the workshop.

If you decide that the writer will play an active part in the workshop, be sure to discuss with the group the writer's role, making it clear that the writer should ask open-ended questions about the chapter, not simply provide a defence for it. These decisions are best taken at the beginning of your experience in the dissertation writing groups, as they set up specific standards of practice.