

SWEETLAND DISSERTATION WRITING GROUPS GUIDELINES FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY WORKSHOP

Peer workshops offer the opportunity to learn from group members through exposure to peers' work in a different academic field. The purpose of the workshop is to start thinking critically about revision strategies together. By workshopping your peers and dealing with different academic fields, you will also improve your ability to revise your own writing for clarity and accessibility. This is particularly important because, once you enter the job market, often the committee that will read your work will be composed of scholars that might not belong to your field of study. It is essential to practice ways to engage in conversation with them, to enhance your professional chances. The following guidelines provide clear directions for each step of the group workshop as well as some general principles to keep in mind during workshop.

Preparing for the Workshop

Step 1: The writer being workshopped should circulate their chapter at least 4 working days before the workshop. This time-frame will allow readers ample time to give constructive and extensive feedback. In addition, writers should include with the chapter a cover letter addressed to readers in which they identify specific concerns. This letter can be drafted following the guidelines in the document "Writer's_Letter." This is the writer's chance to guide the readers toward providing the most useful feedback. Remember, ask your readers exactly what you want to know about how to revise your writing.

Step 2: Readers should follow the document "Feedback_Letter" to draft their response letters. In addition, readers are invited to print a paper version of the chapter and mark it extensively. Readers are then invited to take paper copies of the feedback letter and the marked-up chapter to the workshop, and give those documents to the writer at the end of the workshop, so that the writer has material copy of the feedback. It would be advisable to mark on the chapter's paper copy any later order concerns, such as typos and syntactical issues, since you might not need to spend time talking about them during workshop, but the writer might benefit from your minor editing.

Step 3: Readers should make a list of possible issues to address during the workshop. Keep in mind that you will not have time to address all you've written in your letter to the writer, so choose the 1 or 2 concerns that you believe more pressing. The following questions should help you to think about some topics to address in your list. You need not answer all of these questions, but some may stand out as being pertinent to you.

- Development of central argument. Does the chapter stay on topic/lose focus at any point? Is the chapter geared toward a too restricted, specialized audience? Do you feel you have learned something new reading the chapter, or that you needed to know something in advance before reading the chapter?
- Support. Is there enough evidence to support the central idea? As far as you can tell, is all of the evidence relevant to the main idea? From a lay perspective, do you need to know more? Are some passages too obscure?
- Organization. What is the purpose of the chapter? Is it an introduction? A Lit review? An analysis? An Argument? Please refer to *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* to see if the chapter follows the conventions of its genre. With that in mind, are paragraphs ordered effectively? Do sentences and paragraphs have a clear purpose? Do they use transitions to create relationships? Do they build well on each other?
- Style. Does the voice or tone improve the chapter or take away from the writer's credibility? Is the language use appropriate for the audience?

General workshop principles

1. When, as a reader, it's your time to speak during workshop, start with concerns of the higher order, based on the list you've made in Step 3.
2. Use specific examples. This is why it is better to have a paper copy of the chapter with you, because you can always point out specific parts or sections in it. If the writer needs to go deeper, point to the place that left you too much on the surface. As a helping device, imagine that you are a member of the writer's dissertation committee, or of a hiring committee. Do not shy away from offering constructive criticism.
3. In this respect, offer critique, not summary. You do not need to offer a play-by-play—remember the writer will receive your letter at the end of the workshop. Always remember that revision is most often than not a considerable activity, and writers know that. In your critique, focus on depth.
4. Be kind. Be brave. Remember that the goal of the workshop is to provide a space for the writer to brainstorm essential revisions. It is not an exam; it is a conversation. Writing is an act of discovery, and there is no end to discovery. Your intelligence and interest will help the writers further their discovery. You are an ally in the path toward completion.

The role of the writer

As a writer, remember that you're always in control of your writing. Some feedback you receive might appear not relevant to your purpose, and that's ok. Among your group members, you are the expert on your discipline and your committee's needs, and you will decide what kind of feedback to retain and what to discard. It is better to have more than less. This is why it is very important for you to draft the letter you will send your group as a cover letter along with your chapter, indicating what specific areas you want feedback on. Following the template provided in the "Writer's_Letter" will allow you to retain agency of your writing process. Also, remember that your group members are intelligent, high

achieving people, as you are, at the very top of their disciplines. Chances are, if they find something unclear, it is not simply because they are not from your discipline. You might need to revise/clarify your writing.

Most importantly, we invite you to see workshops as conversations that continue even past the workshop meeting. We encourage you to pay particular attention to the letters you receive from your group, and the paper copies of your chapter that your group gives back to you. Then, we invite you to engage in one-to-one email with any one member of your group if you need clarifications, or if you think that a one-to-one conversation might further help you. If you need some external help in understanding or actuating the feedback you receive, remember that you can always contact Louis Cicciarelli or Simone Sessolo, and they will be happy to work with you.