

# FIRST YEAR CORE COURSE LEADERS' COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TOOLKIT

## FIRST YEAR COURSE LEADERS TOOLKIT ITEM

*Peer review*

THE USQ  
CoPs PROJECT

Faculty of Arts CoP  
and  
Faculty of Business CoP

<http://www.usq.edu.au/cops>

**USQ** UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

### Topic: Peer review

#### Using Peer Review in Learning and Teaching

##### What is the intended outcome?

To begin developing students' sense of judgement: this provides students with the means of understanding how they are assessed throughout their degree, as well as the means of assessing their own, and others', professional performance as graduates.

##### What is the established practice?

Currently, judging performance often remains the sole domain of university teachers, although some do take pains to make desired assessment qualities or criteria clear to students. In such instances, students may understand the criteria by which they are assessed but they do not actively apply it to their own or others' performance – a skill they will be required to marshal as professionals.

##### What are the advantages for teachers and students in the use of peer feedback?

Using peer feedback gives students the opportunity to develop the ability to judge performance according to particular criteria or standards. However, it also provides first year teachers of large cohorts the opportunity to design activities or assessment, which include effective and timely feedback to students.

##### Background

One key role of higher education is the development of graduates who are capable of assessing their own performance, and that of others. This is an important skill, particularly for professionals. Many university teachers have adopted peer review as part of their teaching activities and/or assessment as a means of explicitly developing students' judgement. Ideally, peer review processes reduce workloads for busy first year academic staff, whilst providing students with valuable feedback on important aspects of targeted knowledge and skills.

##### Challenge

The challenge for first year convenors is to use peer review processes effectively and efficiently at a first year level. This means being realistic about level of judgement students may have at this level, and designing accordingly. It also means developing peer assessment processes that do not exact too great a time burden, either on teaching staff or on students themselves. In the USQ context, peer review processes must also be designed with external, as well as on campus students, in mind. Academic staff also face the challenge of assuring standards in peer reviewed assessment activities by building in staff moderation processes.

## **Academic solutions for maximum student impact**

Some community members have adopted fully [online peer assessment models](#). In such instances, students are given a list of criteria with which to anonymously assess the performance of other students in relation to a preliminary assessment item. The convenor moderates student reviews only when the assessment level differs markedly between the two reviewers.

Other members may ask that students conduct [an informal review](#) of each others' work as part of a comprehensive assessment process. In this instance, students are also required to use assessment criteria to assign a particular grade value to another student's work. However, this grade value is used solely as an indicator of the students' understanding of the assessment criteria, as well as an exemplar of what graded work looks like.

Other first year convenors use peer review activities in class, rather than as formal pieces of assessment. One activity requires students to mark a student paper from a previous semester using assessment criteria, and assign a nominal grade. Using the criteria helps students understand the lecturers' expectations of their own work. Peer review activities should also provide a means for external students to participate in the peer review process. However, as it is not part of the overall assessment, it is difficult to ensure external student participation.

## **Key points for effective teaching practice**

- The use of peer review processes in assessment ideally represents an opportunity to provide timely feedback to students without overburdening academic staff
- The use of peer review processes is facilitated by the provision of clear assessment guidelines for students, including assessment criteria and/or questions
- Peer review processes are moderated by convenors and feedback given to students on their peer review performance, where necessary
- At USQ, peer review activities should be equally accessible by both on campus and external students.

## **Final word**

Those community members who have incorporated peer review processes into either their teaching activities or assessment processes have done so with two broad purposes in mind. The first is an acknowledgment that the value of a university degree is enhanced if we develop graduates who are capable of judging their own performance, and that of others. The second is to provide students with clear and timely feedback on their own performance in a way that overburdens neither academic staff, or students themselves.