



Purpose

The primary purpose of peer review is to provide feedback to designers to enable them improve their designs. However, there are residual benefits. Participants in peer review sessions have an opportunity to share and discuss curriculum and assessment designs with colleagues. Mariana Bracetti Academy believes that these sessions provide a powerful approach to professional development since the conversations focus the heart of teaching and learning: What is worthy of understanding in this unit? What counts as evidence that students *really* understand and can use what we are teaching? What knowledge and skills must we teach to enable students to achieve and apply their understandings in meaningful ways?

Roles



The *designer's* role is primarily to listen – not explain, defend, or justify design decisions.



The *reviewers* should be friendly, honest consultants (critical friends) to the designer. The designer's *intent* is the basis of the review. The aim is to improve the designer's idea, not replace it with the reviewers' teaching priorities, style, or favorite activities. The reviewers' job is twofold:

- To give useful feedback
 - Did the effect match the intent?
- To give useful guidance
 - How might the gaps in intent v. effect be removed?
 - How might the design be improved, given the intent?

Review Group Norms

When looking at one another's instructional designs, having a shared set of guidelines helps everyone participate in a manner that is respectful as well as conducive to effective feedback. The group should review the norms below before starting *every* protocol. The facilitator and timekeeper should remind reviewers of the guidelines and schedule when needed at any time during the process.

- *Be respectful of the designer(s).* By making their work more public, educators are exposing themselves to kinds of critiques that may not be used to receiving. If inappropriate questions or comments are posed, the facilitator should make sure they are blocked or withdrawn.
- *Contribute to substantive conversation.* Resist blanket praise or silence. Without thoughtful descriptions, questions, and comments, the designer(s) will not benefit from using the protocol to understand his/her own practice. Be specific when giving feedback and/or guidance.
- *Keep the conversation constructive.* There is a productive middle ground somewhere between feedback that only affirms and feedback that does damage. It is the facilitator's job to make sure that a healthy balance is maintained. At the end of the review, the presenter should be able to revise the work productively on the basis of what was said.
- *Be appreciative of the facilitator's and timekeeper's roles.* This is particularly in regards to following the protocol guidelines and keeping time. A complete protocol is sometimes run on a tight schedule. A protocol that does not allow for all the steps to be enacted properly will do a disservice to the designer(s) and to the reviewers.
- *Try to keep your comments succinct,* and monitor your own air time.

Recommendations for Effective Peer Review

Designers

Designers typically assume that their design is more self-evident than it is. Imagine yourself to be a naïve student. Would you know what to do? Would the flow of the unit be obvious? Do you know how you will be assessed? Is the purpose of the work clear?

Reviewers

A peer review session is successful when the designer feels that the design was understood by peers and improved (or validated) by the subsequent critique and discussion. Always begin by offering feedback in those areas where the design most conforms to the design criteria (i.e., strengths), describing in detail how and where the design met those criteria.

Reviewers give feedback, making clear the basis for the comments in the match (or mismatch) between the goals, assessments, and learning plan, in reference to the design standards. Couching feedback about possible mismatches in question or conditional form may be appropriate. For example:

- “We wondered about the validity of the assessment task, in light of the specified goal.”
- “If your aim is critical thinking, then the assessments don’t seem to demand more than recall.”

Reviewers give guidance in each area where they perceive a gap between intent and effect or some confusion about the design’s purpose or execution. Note that guidance should improve the intent, not substitute the reviewers’ goals or methods for such a unit.

Common Misconceptions

A common misconception about peer review is related to the assumption that we should judge the work of others and that others will judge our design. But the goal of review is to provide helpful feedback and guidance, not judgment.

The distinction between *feedback* and *guidance* is almost universally misunderstood. Despite common parlance, feedback merely describes what happened, not how you feel about it or what should be changed.

The most common mistake in peer review, therefore, as a result of this misconception, is to assume that the peer review process is meant to offer praise and criticism. That is far less important than accurately describing the design’s strengths and weaknesses based on design standards, so that the designer will understand why advice is offered.

Process

❶ *Pre-Review Meeting with Curriculum Coordinator (20 minutes)*

- Designer(s) meet one-on-one with curriculum coordinator at least one week prior to their peer review to review the alignment of the unit's stage one learning goals with the course's scope and sequence guide. The designer(s) is responsible for bringing all of the materials listed below to this meeting.
 - Unit plan
 - Summative assessment(s) with exemplar
 - Three formative assessments, one from each phase of the learning plan (i.e., beginning, middle, and end of the unit)
 - Differentiation plan
- During this time, the curriculum coordinator also confirms that an appropriate rubric has been selected which aligns to the summative assessment(s).
- Curriculum coordinator completes and signs Peer Review Planning Tool and submits it to their Assistant Principal.
- *Please note:* If a curriculum coordinator is the unit designer, he/she will meet with his/her supervisor prior to the peer review.

❷ *Materials Distribution (5 minutes)*

Curriculum coordinators come to each peer review with a content-specific binder that includes a reference copy of the standards and assessment anchors and scope and sequence guides and extra copies of the Peer Review Form.

The designer(s) should prepare individual copies of the following materials for each reviewer:

- Peer review form
- Unit plan
- Summative assessment(s) with exemplar and applicable rubric(s)
- Three formative assessments, one from each phase of the learning plan (i.e., beginning, middle, and end of the unit)
- Differentiation plan

❸ *Overview of Unit with Designer(s) (8 minutes)*

- Establish roles (facilitator and timekeeper). The facilitator's key job is to keep the conversation moving and gently but firmly ensure that the designer(s) listens (instead of defending) when the review is reported. The designer(s) will act as the recorder during the review. He/she is restricted to only answering informational questions and may not participate in the ongoing dialogue.
- Designer(s) provides a brief overview of the unit.
- Reviewers silently skim the unit and review summative and formative assessments to identify clarifying and/or contextual questions for the designer(s).
- Designer(s) states any issues he/she would like highlighted in the feedback session.
- Reviewers ask contextual questions to clarify the designer's intent (e.g., "How are you making assessment criteria clear to students?").

④ *Individual Review of Assessment Quality and Alignment (5 minutes)*

- Each reviewer silently assesses strengths of the design first, then growth opportunities (in relation to the specific design criteria).
- Each reviewer completes the Peer Review Form *before* discussion of the unit by the entire review group.

⑤ *Clarification Questions (5 minutes)*

- After reviewing the materials individually, reviewers are given an opportunity to ask the designer(s) any clarifying questions they might have before engaging in the team discussion.

⑥ *Peers Discuss Assessment Quality and Alignment (20 minutes)*

- Group considers the issues highlighted by the designer(s).
- Review group discusses individual reactions of strengths and growth opportunities (in terms of design standards).
- Designer(s) are silent and taking notes during this time. Some review groups have found it helpful to have the designer(s) remain in the room but sit outside the discussion circle.

⑦ *Concluding Remarks (2 minutes)*

- Designer(s) describes key takeaways from the review experience, including intended action steps.

⑧ *Post-Review with Supervisor (via e-mail)*

- Within one week of the peer review, teacher will e-mail supervisor the following materials:
 - Completed peer review form
 - Original *and* revised unit plan
 - Original *and* revised summative assessment(s) with exemplar and applicable rubric(s)
 - Original *and* revised formative assessments
 - Original *and* revised differentiation plan
 - Sampling of learning plan components aligned to the revised assessments
- The supervisor will review the materials and recommend any further revisions that will maximize alignment between learning goals, assessments, and activities.