
"TO SIT BESIDE" THE ONE ASSESSED: PEERS
HELPING PEERS ASSESS THEIR OWN WRITING
IN A WRITING CENTER

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"To assess" comes by way of Middle English from the Latin "assidere," meaning "to sit beside." This presentation examined the ways in which students can "sit beside" each other and help one another evaluate their writing. In learning to write and to assess their own writing, students collaborate with peers they trust: ideally, this is what a diverse community of peer tutors and peer writers in a writing center attempts, together picturing audiences, questioning and clarifying textual meanings, and becoming more fully conscious of the ways writers compose and revise. In the process, both the peer tutors and the peer writers not only grow more

self-reflective but gradually learn to assess or judge their own writing for its effectiveness in communicating to specific groups of people. The overall goal of peer tutors is to focus on the value of writing as a means of making meaning and communicating that meaning: with a meaningful goal like this, peer writers have a motive to monitor and assess their own writing.

Writing centers staffed with peer tutors are particularly well-equipped to assist the student through the assessment process because peer tutors are nonauthoritarian and do not belong to the institution of experts that has designed the assessment guidelines. Well-trained and supervised peer tutors, in fact, are in an excellent position to mediate between the student and the assessing institution. If peer tutors from diverse disciplines are trained to view the making and communicating of meaning as the most important goals in their collaboration with student writers, they can stimulate and reinforce these writers' self-reflectiveness and ability to assess what they are writing. Moreover, peer tutors may also be in a better position to encourage self-assessment in a peer's writing process than teachers or other assessors, in part because peer tutors are less threatening to students than are teachers.

The remainder of the session described the ways in which peer tutors can help students improve their self-assessment abilities in light of the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP), a state-wide program of writing, reading, and mathematical skills.