Peer feedback & Deep learning

Over the last decade, peer feedback assignments have become more common in many universities. Research has shown that it improves your learning, your writing and your grades. This factsheet is designed to explain why peer feedback is beneficial and how to make sure you get the most out of it.

Benefits of peer feedback

✔ Improve your own work
A fresh set of eyes can tell you whether your main question is clear, your argumentation is logical, and your conclusion is sound. They might also catch spelling and grammar mistakes. In addition, peers often use a language that is more accessible and specific than that of your teacher.

✔ Practice your critical thinking
You don't agree with the feedback you received? Good! You shouldn't take everything others say for granted. You can ask your peer to clarify what they meant and discuss your differences. You may find that they can give you some good reasons to re-examine your work.

✔ Reflect on your academic process
Looking at your peer's approach to the same assignment gives you the chance to reflect on your own understanding and execution of it.

✔ Expand and revise your knowledge
You may come across some valuable insights and references in your peer's work that you had not considered before.
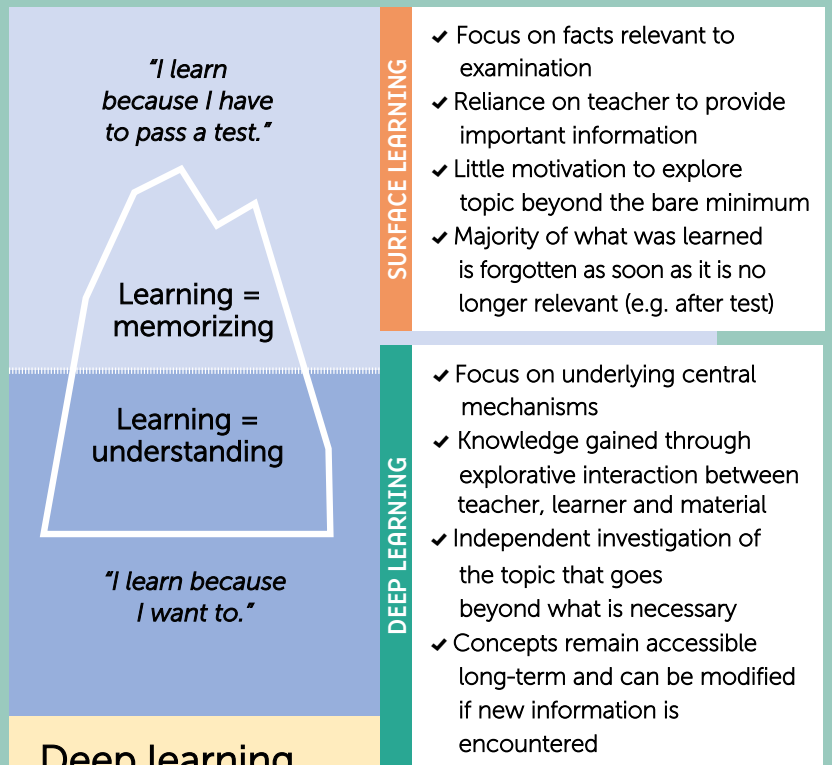
✔ Use your communication skills
Peer feedback creates a dialogue in which you might need to explain and back up your under-standing of the assignment and the material you or your peer worked on.

✔ Avoid procrastination
If more feedback sessions are organized at several points between the first draft and the final version may help to keep you on track and finish your work on time.

Taken together, all these elements promote deep learning. You can find out what exactly that is and why it is important in the box on the right.

"I learn because I have to pass a test."

Learning = memorizing

Learning = understanding

"I learn because I want to."

SURFACE LEARNING
- ✔ Focus on facts relevant to examination
- ✔ Reliance on teacher to provide important information
- ✔ Little motivation to explore topic beyond the bare minimum
- ✔ Majority of what was learned is forgotten as soon as it is no longer relevant (e.g. after test)

DEEP LEARNING
- ✔ Focus on underlying central mechanisms
- ✔ Knowledge gained through explorative interaction between teacher, learner and material
- ✔ Independent investigation of the topic that goes beyond what is necessary
- ✔ Concepts remain accessible long-term and can be modified if new information is encountered

Deep learning

In schools and universities around the globe, teachers aim to provoke deep learning processes in their students because it results in understanding rather than just memorizing. Unfortunately, it is difficult to simply make deep learning happen on command. Many promoting factors such as the nature of your test or your teacher's attitude are beyond your control. However, you can prompt yourself into a deep learning process by seeing the acquisition of knowledge as dynamic and inter-active. Giving and discussing peer feedback stimulates critical thinking, helps to integrate new knowledge with what you al-ready knew and facilitates making new connections. Research has shown that discussing a topic with others, rather than just reading about it silently, promotes deep learning. Peer feed-back can be used to bring about such a discussion and deep learning process, improving your retention of the material and helping you to apply it to new situations.

You might not deem all new information you encounter during your studies "worthy" of deep learning. However, keep in mind that many courses in university are built on one another and the assumption that you expand your knowledge of a subject and incorporate new information from higher levels continu-ously. Employing deep learning strategies early on can make understanding more complex concepts in higher levels easier.

Student factsheet
Peer feedback & Deep learning

IN SHORT

SMALL PICTURE

Peer feedback gives you the option to correct mistakes and improve your work before you submit it.

BIG PICTURE

Peer feedback trains critical thinking about your own and other's work, helps you improve your academic process prepares you for dealing with constructive criticism.

Giving good peer feedback

Giving good feedback in general can be hard. However, using yourself as a guideline can give you some inspiration: What kind of feedback do you find most useful? Which comments helped you improve your work the most? Which ones did you struggle to incorporate? Answering these questions for yourself should already provide you with some basic ideas.
You may for instance prefer to receive feedback on the introduction and clarity of the main question, the structure of your paper, on argumentation and readability, rather than grammar and spelling.

This table elaborates on some of the do's and don'ts of peer feedback you should consider.

DO'S	EXAMPLE
Focus your feedback on the task, not the learner.	"You reach a conclusion without elaborating on step X and Y." instead of "You are always jump-ing to conclusions without explaining anything."
Elaborate on why you are giving this feedback.	"Your title gives good insight in what the text will be about!" instead of "Great title!"
Present elaborated feedback in manageable units.	"I would move this paragraph to the beginning to make the structure of the discussion clearer." instead of "Your discussion is missing structure, please rewrite."
Be specific and clear with feedback message, preferably linking your feedback to the criteria.	"One of our criteria is about spelling. I saw some mistakes in the introduction (example). Don't forget to spell check your text."
Promote a learning goal orientation via feedback.	"I think Hattie is using a different definition of efficient feedback." instead of "Please look at page 187 of Hattie's book for the right definition of feedback."

DON'TS	EXAMPLE
Do not present feedback that dis-courages the learner or threatens the learner's self-esteem.	"Did you actually understand the assignment?"
Avoid using unexplained praise.	Instead of "This looks great!", try to indicate what is good, such as: "The format you used really supports the flow of the text."
Avoid using progressive hints that always terminate with the correct answer.	"You used a wrong quote. It should be [correct answer]."
Minimize use of extensive error analyses and diagnosis.	Instead of changing words in the text or com-menting on every sentence, try to summarize small but comparable mistakes with an over-arching advise.

Authors

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