

Tips for Incorporating Feedback



What do you do when you get feedback from readers? Maybe you went to the Writing Center, maybe you did peer review in class, maybe you asked a friend or a parent to read your work, too. You now have multiple copies of your draft with other people's notes on them. Now what?

Start with big picture issues and work toward specific, focused issues, in the following order:

1. Comments on argument
2. Comments on development/evidence
3. Comments on organization/structure
4. Comments on word choice, grammar, syntax.

If you get a comment on something, check other feedback to see if multiple readers commented on the same thing.

- If so, that means it's definitely worth your attention.
- If not, you will have to make a judgment call: do you agree with the comment, and why or why not? Do you see a problem with the results of what's been commented upon? For example, if the reader pointed out ambiguity in a word you used, it might make a bigger difference if that word is in your introduction and part of your thesis than if it occurs in the middle of one of your body paragraphs.
- Even if you don't agree, you should weigh the comment as a legitimate response to your writing.

If you find yourself feeling defensive, frustrated, or angry, take a break.

Don't try to deal with all the feedback in one session. Give yourself time to process each area of feedback.

Be sure to look back at feedback on prior work, as well, to make sure you're aware of and have addressed any patterns in your writing or in readers' responses to it.

Keep in mind that each reviewer has different strengths, weaknesses, and areas of focus as a reader, so while you will likely have some overlapping feedback, many comments may only come from one or two reviewers. It's important to consider everything in order to make the best use of the feedback.

So what do I actually do to sort through everything?

- See Revise and Resubmit Tips for more help, especially with organizing your approach.
- Look over all the feedback first, to get a sense of any patterns in their comments and to work from higher order concerns (argument, evidence, development) to lower order concerns (organization, grammar, punctuation, conventions of academic English).
- If they've used word processing to make comments and track changes, you can merge documents, getting all the feedback onto a single draft and using different colors to indicate comments from different readers (works best with no more than 4 readers). In a copy of the document without the feedback, make changes and notes to yourself about how you'd like to improve the draft, based on seeing everything in one place.
- Work paragraph by paragraph, looking for comments from each reader and making notes about patterns in feedback or changes you'd like to make.
- Address each reader's remarks on your whole draft individually, using track changes so you can easily see what comments may no longer apply.