

Chapter 9. Reviewing a Written Draft

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This chapter will prepare you to:

- Identify and adopt a reviewer’s mindset
- Constructively review a peer’s draft
- Honestly review your own writing
- Prepare for and benefit from a reviewer’s feedback

Even if you agree with the concepts that “all writers struggle *and revise*” and “writing is a social act,” you may not yet be committed to the idea that *advanced writing requires formal reviewing*. It can be easy to imagine that writers “draft” a text and then naturally shift to “revising” a text, ignoring the effort and intention that goes into the in-between step of reviewing. And writers often talk as if reviewing happens without much thought: “I had a peer look over my essay” or “I checked my draft and fixed it up.” It may even seem that reviewing is a luxury: “If I get a chance, I’ll have someone read it over” or “If I have time, I’ll do some editing on the copy.”

Yet for advanced writers, assessing or reviewing a draft is not a simplistic or casual task: it is the gateway toward the third reflective cycle of improving as a writer, and it is linked to several threshold concepts.



You can become a good writer and a better writer

You already have many viable writing skills, and you are capable of becoming a better writer and a competent writer of many kinds of texts.



Good writers frequently struggle and revise

Since writing is difficult for many writers, and the expectations for success depend on the exact audience or context, a writer’s main job is to persist through difficulty.



Writing is a social rather than an individual act

Writing is always connected to a community, and so your choices always do and always should reflect your interactions with other writers and readers.



Advanced writers study and reflect on their writing

Writers study writing just as chemists study chemistry and musicians study music—and advanced writers use repeated reflective practices to understand our own work.

The crucial step of reviewing is linked to the idea that writing is a communication act focused on affecting a reader, not just about producing error-free paragraphs. *Re-viewing* involves *seeing a document through a reader’s eyes*, because only readers can judge whether a text is successful and a writer is improving.

Moreover, it's helpful to remind yourself that *reviewing always benefits the reviewer*. To start with, practicing the mindset and moves of reviewing will strengthen your ability to identify ways to improve your own writing as you finish a project. The beneficial effects of reviewing also spread throughout your work as a writer: when you have proficient reviewing skills, you will be able to trust that you can successfully revise your writing, and thus you will trust that you can relax and explore as you write your early draft, so you can bring confidence and creativity to your whole writing process. In addition, practicing the mindset and moves of reviewing on your own text and on peers' documents helps you stay aware of the social act of writing for another reader.

You will achieve the strongest benefits from this process when you separate reviewing from editing. Editors tend to focus on word- and sentence-level errors; in contrast, reviewers need to focus their attention on the bigger picture, to investigate whether the writer's work matches their purposes, meets their readers' needs, provides appropriate and sufficient information and analysis, and organizes key ideas to best support the overall message. Reviewers may comment that whole sections of a document need to be added, moved, changed, or cut entirely in order to strengthen the effects the writer can have on readers. Since reviewing focuses on large-scale changes, writers benefit most when we set time to review or be reviewed before we set time to edit and correct: this way, we don't work hard to fix a sentence only to decide later that we should cut that whole paragraph out.

Explore 9.1



Consider your most recent experiences receiving feedback on your writing, from peers or from an instructor. Describe at least one of the following as specifically as you can, and add a sentence or so to explain why you think the comment made you feel the way you did:

- A review or single comment that was confusing or upset you as a writer: why?
- A review or single comment that cheered you up as a writer: why?
- A review or single comment that helped you improve as a writer: why?

Add a sentence to finish up: How would you describe the kind of review feedback that you would most want to receive as a writer on a current project?

Learn



- To learn more about **completing a draft**, see [Chapter 7, Generating and Organizing an Early Draft](#).
- To learn more about **revising a draft**, see [Chapter 10, Revising from Feedback and Reflection](#).
- To learn more about **editing a draft**, see [Chapter 11, Editing in Context](#).

9.1 Adopting a Reviewer's Mindset: Contextual, Honest, and Empathetic

Whether you're reviewing a peer's document or your own draft, you will find it helpful to step into a middle-distance space in which you are neither the author of the document (who is highly invested in representing a particular view or approach) nor an average, disinterested reader of the document (who may know nothing about the writer or the writer's situation). If you focus too strongly on the existing document, you won't be able to imagine how it could evolve and improve. But if you try to review without knowing what the expectations or purposes are, your suggestions may not be relevant to the writer's context.

As you prepare to review a text, retrain your brain to adopt these reviewing habits of mind: contextual awareness, detailed honesty, and empathy with readers and writers.

A good reviewer accounts for the context

As a reviewer you will need to consider the document in light of its intended rhetorical context: you should note what the author aims to accomplish; what the audience, discourse community, supervisor, and/or instructor expects from a text like this; and how your own knowledge or background affects your reading. Thus the more you know about the context of the draft and the criteria for judging it, the more accurate and helpful you will be to the author. Your goal is to diagnose where the text meets and does not meet the expectations of its author and readers (including yourself), to identify places that succeed, and to provide specific suggestions to the author about how to improve the next draft.

You may need additional information to help you review contextually, so you could:

- Seek out a statement from the author about their goals or concerns
- Inquire about or search for information on the intended audience and their current knowledge or needs
- Acquire an understanding of the genre or the assignment and the expectations that the writing project should meet

A good reviewer provides detailed honesty

As a reviewer of your own text or another writer's text, you can only be helpful if you are honest and thorough. (Think about how you appreciate it if a good friend tells you about the spinach caught in your front teeth or a shirt button that isn't fastened.) If you spot a problem but don't tell the author about it, or if

you respond positively but don't explain why, the author cannot learn from your feedback and the document won't improve.

A good reviewer provides more than a random gut reaction: a good reviewer knows and says *how* they are being honest. You might use your honesty as you give your personal responses, and reflect that in an “I-statement” focused on your perspective: “As someone who has never traveled to Hong Kong, I would like more description of the sights and sounds of the city.” You might use your honesty as you give a context-aware response: “Thinking like a grant-committee member, I am impressed by the detailed and reasonable budget in your project proposal.” Even if the author disagrees, you have provided an honest and detailed response so that the author can gauge how and why one real reader would view the document.

You may need specific strategies to help you review honestly:

- Pay attention to your reactions, and try to identify what part of the text caused them.
- Pay attention to your judgments, and try to identify which of your experiences or expectations influenced them.
- Use I-statements to help convey that you are providing one reader's viewpoint.

A good reviewer empathizes with writers and readers

As an advanced reviewer, you take up a stance between the author and the reader, and you will provide more helpful feedback when you can read the text from both of their perspectives. As someone who empathizes with the author, you can recall how difficult writing is, envision how much time and effort went into the current draft, and consider what kind of suggestions can be most helpful to the author. As someone who empathizes with the reader, you can imagine how frustrated someone can be if a text has incomplete or confusing information, how resistant someone can be if a text argues for a difficult belief or action, and how pleased someone can be when a text connects with his or her concerns.

You may employ specific responses to help you review empathetically:

- Describe problems as specific areas that simply need more development, rather than suggesting that an author wasn't intelligent or hard-working.
- Explain why some reasonable readers might need additional data or explanation, even if a section seems clear to the author.
- Use “For example” statements to provide exact suggestions to the author about improving so they can see a new way of connecting with readers.

Explore 9.2



Think about a time recently when you gave someone feedback on their work—whether it was a writing project, artistic or sports performance, their cooking or driving, or an on-the-job task. What did you find easiest or most rewarding about doing that review? What was most difficult or frustrating? Which of the strategies noted in this section—paying attention to the context and criteria, being honest and specific, empathizing with the reviewee or their audience/clients—do you think would require the most effort or practice for you to use during that kind of review?

9.2 Focus on Equity: Reviewing to Create Opportunities

Whether you are reviewing your own or someone else’s draft, you have more power than you realize. Review is often the first point at which writers get an overall judgment of our work, and those first comments can have a significant effect on the direction of our document and our immediate and ongoing dispositions about our writing. In many cases, reviewing contextually, using a reviewer’s empathetic mindset, and framing your comments as I-statements, among other strategies listed in this chapter can help you provide judgments that are constructive and relevant.

However, judgments about “good writing” are not neutral: we know that writers (and readers) operate within systems that provide inequitable resources and even actively exclude or discriminate against some kinds of writers. And so good reviewing isn’t neutral, either: you will improve your reviewing when you stay alert to assumptions or expectations that lead toward exclusion. You and the writers you review will benefit when you deliberately focus on creating more opportunities for a writer’s success rather than closing down opportunities.

Acknowledge possible reader biases

Once you agree that there is no single definition of a “good writer” or good writing, you are prepared to look skeptically at any assignment guidelines, grading rubrics, or descriptions of “best strategies” for a specific writing task or genre and ask whether those strategies are designed with diverse writers and readers in mind. You can also stay aware of your own expectations: these may be purely personal preferences (perhaps you dislike the word “moist” or you really enjoy taking an adversarial point of view), but as with an instructor’s criteria on a grading rubric, your own expectations may be shaped by exclusionary cultural or institutional values that most of us take for granted.

As you read and evaluate someone else’s writing, you may prefer or be told to value US academic and professional writing features such as:

- Sentence-level correctness focused on Standard Edited American English

- Hierarchical structure and organization (with direct thesis and topic sentences and/or closed-form paragraphs)
- Objective approaches with no personal examples, humor, or digressions
- Evidence and examples based only on research reports from a few authorized publications
- Argumentation that focuses on victory for one view rather than compromise among many

These may in fact be exactly the strategies that a writer needs to employ to succeed with their purpose and their audience. However, you may also want to keep in mind that these criteria are largely based on the long-established habits, preferences, and expectations of the White, upper-class, Christian, neurotypical men who established the country's universities and professional organizations, so they may rely on a view of "good writing" that is narrow or even exclusionary.

It's not always easy for readers to know for sure if an expectation or standard is reasonable and inclusive, or if it is built on shaky assumptions about how one kind of writing (or writer) is always better than other kinds. But it is always useful for reviewers to base their feedback in a specific context ("To reach the audience of school board members you identify, you should try ____") rather than stating that some kind of writing move is universally right or wrong.

If you're not sure of what you see, or you're not sure what the writer's options are, how can you respond? You may choose to use your review comment to make multiple options clear to the writer: "I think your use of a personal story here is effective for your intended audience, but you may want to remember that the assignment directions recommend limiting your evidence to published research." You may want to more directly advocate on behalf of the writer's approach: "I think your use of these sentence fragments gives your writing energy and authenticity, so I hope you'll keep them even if a few people complain about your 'grammar.'" Whenever you acknowledge that there are multiple ways for a writer to be successful, you are helping to value their perspective and increase their opportunities.

Help the writer create an inclusive document

Remember how the reviewer needs to empathize with *both* writers and readers? You can serve both goals by looking for ways that the writer can use their content and strategies to create a document that is inclusive of and accessible by diverse readers. As you read, you can pay attention to questions like these:

- **Who is included and represented?** Do the writer's sources, examples, analyses, and even word choices demonstrate diverse perspectives and treat them respectfully? Where might the writer revise to ensure that many different readers see their views acknowledged?

- **How are different perspectives represented?** Where could the writer replace an unproven generalization about people (“Gay men always know about fashion” or “People with ADHD don’t succeed in high-pressure workplaces”) with specific data or more nuanced claims—or perhaps delete the reference altogether?
- **What assumptions need checking?** If the writer assumes that all readers will be familiar with their reference to the Christian Bible or be physically able to climb several flights of stairs, what revisions can you suggest that will help the writer connect to readers who don’t share their background?

In reviewing school and workplace writing, you’re likely to find that directly discriminatory statements—especially those that argue that some groups of people don’t deserve basic human rights and respect—are infrequent and fairly easy to point out: “This paragraph suggests that you believe that people with different religious beliefs from yours are less intelligent; how can you revise to be less critical of people who are different?” Even omissions can be noted with a brief and direct comment: “To more accurately write about ‘parents’ here you could research and include information about divorced, single, or gay parents’ experiences.”

Yet it’s also common for a reviewer to find that it’s difficult to tell whether a writer is unfairly and unproductively excluding some readers or making a deliberate and justifiable choice to frame an issue or respond to a rhetorical situation. After all, writers are allowed and often expected to make arguments, even arguments about groups of people, that can reasonably be debated and even directly provoke disagreement: “To promote national security and hemispheric stability, the US should increase immigration from its neighbors in Central and South America, even if that means decreasing immigration from more distant countries in Europe and Asia.”

If you’re not sure whether a writer is unfairly excluding readers or perspectives, how can you respond? You might find that strategies for honesty and empathy are particularly useful. You might be able to use your I-statements as a baseline: “I am worried that this example is based in generalizations about ‘Central America’ that unfairly lump everyone together.” It’s also useful to frame your comments to show you assume no ill-will by the writer: “You might not have had time to locate research written by people from outside the US, but having those perspectives will strengthen your credibility with readers.”

Challenging discrimination and exclusion during the review process is everyone’s responsibility; it’s not just gay readers or Buddhist readers who should notice when a writer’s document does not acknowledge their specific perspective. All writers benefit from support that enables us to be more inclusive, and all reviewers benefit from becoming careful readers who are focused on creating, rather than restricting, opportunities for others.

Learn



- To learn more about how **good writing is not a neutral judgment**, see [Chapter 1, Reframing Your Story About Writing](#).
- To learn more about **inclusive reading strategies**, see [Chapter 6, Reading as a Writer](#).
- To learn more about **closed-form paragraphs**, see [Chapter 7, Generating and Organizing an Early Draft](#).
- To learn more about **the limitations of Standard American Edited English**, see [Chapter 11, Editing in Context](#).

9.3 Reviewing a Peer’s Draft: Eight Moves

In order to achieve a “middle distance” position that supports the writer and looks out for future readers, good reviewers set their intentions before they review and check in with key strategies as they review. If you are reviewing someone else’s draft, choosing your strategies can help you give “constructive criticism”: feedback that is honest and helpful to the writer, rather than overly critical or vaguely positive. If you are reviewing your own writing, remember that writers are predisposed to like what we have written and to overlook any flaws. So choosing your strategies in advance can help you avoid just deciding that everything is mostly fine already. (This may be why horror-fiction writer Stephen King dramatically advises writers-who-review-writing to “Kill your darlings,” that is, be willing to modify or delete even sections you really like.) Reviewing intentionally helps you identify what’s working or not working in a document more efficiently and effectively.

Prepare to review contextually

Before you begin, make a list of three or four major criteria that the readers or the writer in this exact rhetorical context expect the draft to meet, so that you can look especially carefully for how the writer meets those needs. If you don’t know what these are, ask for help from the writer, the instructor, or an adviser, or do some research online. You can best focus your review by considering one factor at a time (such as “providing exact evidence”), and checking each sentence, paragraph, or section for that one feature before moving to the next section.

Critique the draft, not the person

As an empathizing writer yourself, you should assume that the person writing the draft is at least as smart, hard-working, engaged, and committed as you are, so that any problems in this draft have come about because the work is difficult, the nights are long, and even brilliant people make mistakes. Use I-Statements and

focus on the current text: try to frame any problem as a local, temporary issue (“I think paragraph four right now is mostly summary rather than analysis”) rather than a personal failing (“You clearly didn’t think about this much”).

Be greedy

As someone who empathizes with the reader, you need to ask for what you and other readers need. Request the explanations, evidence, connections, reasoning, beauty, or motivation that you need in order to be fully engaged or moved by the document. Don’t take the writer’s word for something or settle for a vague description because you think you know what they probably mean. If you don’t get it, it’s not “just you”—or even if it is, you are an intelligent reader who deserves a full explanation. It’s your job to ask; let the writer decide whether to answer your questions or not.

Practice praise

We are often trained to be specific in criticism but find that it’s harder to explain our praise. You can learn to say what you enjoy or admire and why, in more than two or three words, so that writers know you see the heavy lifting they are doing: one good model is “I like the way you use [writing strategy] here, because ____.” Specific praise helps writers replicate their best work elsewhere in their writing, and it helps you gain expertise from what other writers do well. Aim to praise several different kinds of work that a writer does throughout the draft, from structure to reasoning to word choice.

Write full sentences

“Good job!” and “I don’t get it” may be honest reactions, but these brief comments will not help a writer improve their draft. Write sentences that include a “because” phrase to explain why you think something works or why you think it doesn’t meet your needs or the usual standards for this genre. If you can, also write out a “For example” sentence to show what the writer could try instead.

Identify highs and lows

Even when you are not confident that you can make expert recommendations to a writer, you can identify places in the document that seem to you to be stronger and less strong at a particular approach: “Your most persuasive evidence comes in paragraph 2; I think the evidence in paragraph 4 is less persuasive because ____” or “You state your argument most clearly when you say ____; however, I don’t see that argument so clearly when you say ____.” Your judgments help the writer bring all of their writing up to the highest standard.

Provide exact suggestions

The hardest work of a reviewer comes in explaining yourself and your suggestions. Anyone can click a “Like” button and walk away; it’s much harder work to dig around in your brain to say why a sentence affected you as it did or to suggest one or two alternatives, especially when you’re not confident in your response. The secret good news is that every time you give a specific explanation or suggestion to another writer, you not only practice generosity, you practice solving writing challenges that you yourself might have some day.

Learn from the process

Often reviewers learn more from providing review comments than they do from receiving comments. It’s easier to see someone else’s writing problems than your own, and you can use your new confidence to increase awareness of your own achievements and challenges. Take time during or after your review to note what you saw another writer do well that you want to emulate, as well as to remind yourself of suggestions you made for another writer that you could try to implement yourself in some way.

Explore 9.3

List two of the strategies listed earlier in this section that you hope people who review your writing will use: why would they be helpful to you as a writer? Then list one of the strategies that you would like to improve at while you are reviewing other writers’ work, and give a suggestion about one way you might “train your brain” to keep that approach in mind as you review.



9.4 Reviewing Your Own Draft: Eight More Moves

It can be difficult for writers to see our own achievements and flaws. When we look at our work, we read the document and we read our own minds, including every thought we’ve ever had about the subject, and we respond as ourselves, not as a reader with a different history, knowledge base, or value system. The steps below each help writers constructively review a document—not just “looking it over,” but preparing to revise—by imagining an alternate response or approach.

Gain some literal distance

Find a way to step back from your draft. You might sleep on it, take a walk, or freewrite on something else. You might shift your perspective on the draft, or try thinking of yourself as another person while you read: your instructor, one of your friends or relatives, a character on TV. Or you can physically change the way

you read: read aloud, dramatically; read paragraph by paragraph in reverse order; read a print copy that you cover up (or a screen copy in a short window) so you can see only a line or two at a time.

Assess key components one at a time

Any project or document has a set of core elements or crucial criteria to fulfill: a typical academic essay has an introduction with a thesis, paragraphs with transitions, and a conclusion; a lab report may have separate sections for procedures and results as well as clearly designed graphs or tables. Instead of reading your document start to finish, break it apart and check each component to see that it meets expectations: do your paragraphs usually start or conclude with clarifying or argumentative statements? do your graphs each have informative captions that relate to the text? does your ending balance your beginning in focus, force, and style?

Be honest with yourself

Identify at least two or three major criteria or goals that were hardest for you in this writing task, and focus on improving those moves. Give each paragraph or section a comment: how well did you do on key criteria? what else do you need? Also, try to focus tightly on what you did write so that you don't get distracted by what you hoped you'd write. You could cover your current draft, write two sentences about the main point you hope it conveys, and then compare: does your draft actually state what you just wrote? Or ask yourself: Which part of this draft best matches your core goals when you started, and which part seems least connected?

Imagine a skeptical reader

Build a picture in your head of a single challenging reader in your target audience, someone who is very smart and very skeptical. If you say "blue," this reader will frown and say, "Blue? What version of blue? Why blue and not green? Do you have any data about blue? I read three articles about blue last week that disagree with your point. Does there have to be color at all?" This reader's favorite responses are "Why?" and "How so?" and "But on the other hand . . ." Get a picture of this reader in your head, and maybe even give them a name. Now put that reader in a chair right next to you, reading your essay with you: what would they say to your second paragraph?

Practice praise

When we look at our own writing, we don't often specifically identify what we think is best meeting the goals of the project: we waver between loving everything

and worrying that everything is awful. Learn to identify specific sentences or sections that you think are better than average in your draft and write yourself a note explaining why, in more than two or three words: is this your most vivid image? your strongest refutation of a counterargument? Even if you can only say, “This example doesn’t stink as much as everything else,” you have a stronger sense of achievements that you can build on.

Consider multiple alternatives

As you come upon a particularly sticky or problematic spot, don’t rush to create a single solution. You know that a “lack of evidence” could be a knowledge problem that you could address with more research, or a rhetorical problem you could address by using more examples from your experience that your readers will respond to. Propose two or even three options, even if one of them seems outlandish or impossible that you could consider when you come back to revise. (Sometimes it’s easier to propose three choices than to propose one, because there’s no pressure to create the perfect revision right on the spot.)

Tell yourself why

You might find it convenient to combine reviewing and revising, to spot a problem and then immediately change the draft for the better. However, to gain the most learning from this process, you should at least pause and explain to yourself, in speech or writing, why you are making the change: “I’m adding more exact evidence rather than restating a vague assertion” or “I need to move a strong claim from my conclusion to my introduction now that I know what my point is.” This reflective step helps you remember the strategy so you can use it again.

Be patient

Even expert writers don’t usually identify and fix all of their writing problems in one review session. First, a one-time fix is nearly impossible: every time you change a document, the changes themselves are likely to create at least a few other areas that need adjusting. More importantly, reviewing and revising can be difficult and exhausting work. Do as much as you can in one pass, and try to allow yourself at least one more pass (hopefully not at three o’clock in the morning) of praises and suggestions about your writing.

Explore 9.4

Which of the self-review strategies described in this section—or any other approaches—have helped you carefully examine your own writing in the past? List at least two, and explain how they helped you see your own accomplishments and difficulties more clearly.



Practice



- To practice **gaining some distance** on your draft by writing in a new approach, see [Funny Story](#), [Letter to Kermit](#), [Values Freewrite](#), or [Write the Problem](#).
- To practice **changing perspectives** to help you look at your draft a new way, see [Audience Switch](#), [Genre Switch](#), or [Stance Switch](#).
- To practice **considering alternatives**, see [Assumption Inspection](#) or [Magic Three Choices](#).

9.5 Preparing for and Participating in Review: Six Practices

When you submit a multiple-choice exam for evaluation, there's no preparation or negotiation: an automated system can decide, impersonally, whether you selected the right answers. When you are seeking feedback on a writing project, whether from a peer, an instructor, or a supervisor, you are engaged in a rhetorical situation where there are multiple ways to succeed. How you prepare yourself and your reviewer—and your dispositions toward the review process and the feedback—can significantly improve your satisfaction and thus improve your writing.

Provide your best, most complete draft of the moment

Whether your peers are reviewing a single sentence for a thesis-sentence workshop or a complete draft of a major analytical essay, you should treat this as an opportunity to work to your maximum abilities. As an early drafter, you don't have to write a perfect document the first or second time out. However, to learn as much as possible from a review, you also don't want to throw something together randomly at the last minute. If you write a draft that is as good as you can make it at the time, then many suggestions from readers will be new ideas you hadn't considered, and you'll have more opportunity to learn from the review.

Explain your overall goals

Even if your peers are working on a very similar assignment, and even if your supervisor generally knows about your project, they may not know precisely who your target audience is and what their expectations are; what central idea, image, experience, or argument you're trying to convey; what writing strategies you're trying to employ; or what you're hoping to learn from this review. Whether you write a headnote at the top of your document or speak to your reader in advance, you can help set the stage: the more information you can provide to your readers about the context of your document, the more accurate and specific your readers' comments can be.

Ask for what you need

Every writer of a draft knows at least some of its weak points already. We don't always know how to describe them precisely, and we don't know how to fix them (if we did, they wouldn't be our weak points!), but we feel it in our guts: the intro feels flat, paragraph three doesn't quite fit, or we don't have enough hard data about the kittiwakes' migration habits. If you know what you need, say so: use a written note or a spoken request to ask your reader specifically to help you decide how to improve these sections. You can also ask readers to provide the type of feedback you prefer: would a praise-focused review help build your confidence right now, or are you in need of someone's skeptical eye to help spot possible weak spots in your arguments?

Describe what you already plan to improve

Every writer of a draft already has plans to improve it: one writer is already planning to interview their friend who creates smartphone apps, and another one realized late at night that they need to say more about the motivations of the main character in the novel they're analyzing. If you already have ideas how to improve your draft, say so: use a written headnote, a few margin comments, or a spoken explanation to inform your reader. That way, your reader can give you feedback on your specific plans rather than spending time advising you on problems you already know how to solve.

Take reader comments seriously but not always precisely

Any reviewer who says honestly "I don't understand this argument" or "I need more information about the ionosphere here" is absolutely right: they did not have a satisfactory experience reading your document. That doesn't mean that their comment tells you the one right pathway to success. As the author, you must decide if each comment is:

- **Accurate and precisely usable:** the reviewer has identified a problem and you see immediately that following their suggestion will improve your document. You can revise following the reviewer's lead.
- **Accurate and generally usable:** you might think of these as "smoke alarm" comments, since the reader has identified a problem but hasn't convinced you that this is where the fire is. You might look to see if there's another way to improve the reader's experience: perhaps your argument needs more background in an earlier section, or you need to remind readers of your earlier definitions of atmospheric conditions on Jupiter.
- **Accurate and not usable:** your reader might have been personally honest but might ask for information that your primary audience really doesn't

need. Before you decide to set aside this comment and keep your current sentences, though, check your assumptions: are you sure your primary audience is going to know what you mean, or should you take a cue from your reader and provide a little more detail?

Recognize what you gain

Participating in a review process always benefits you as a writer, whether or not your reader provides any accurate-and-usable suggestions. The moment you began writing a draft knowing that a live reader would review it, you wrote more as a person communicating with other real people, and so your writing got better. You then produced a draft that you will have the opportunity to revise. And if you review someone else's draft while a reviewer reads yours, you have the opportunity to see (and perhaps borrow some of) that writer's strategies, while at the same time you are practicing your writing strategies every time you comment. By the time you return to your own draft, you'll have some distance and perhaps some new approaches, and so you will be a better writer and problem solver, even if all your reviewer has done is draw smiley faces all over your draft.

Explore 9.5

Consider a writing project you're working on now, or a draft you created recently, and write a short "Dear Reader" note that you could post (or might have posted) at the top of it. In a few sentences, you might explain what you were aiming to accomplish in the project, what you are/were most concerned about or hoping for feedback on, and/or what kind(s) of revisions you already have/had plans to make. If you ask your reader questions, make them specific so that you get better answers: instead of asking "Does this essay make sense?" consider asking "How could I catch my audience's attention better at the start?" or "What additional information should I include on page four?"

