

Adapting Editorial Peer-Review for Classroom Use
Dr. Cheryl E. Ball, Illinois State University, Normal, IL, USA

Abstract

This article picks up, literally, where another one leaves off: “Assessing Scholarly Multimedia: A Rhetorical Genre-Studies Approach” in *Technical Communication Quarterly* (Ball, 2012). In that article, I describe how I have brought my editorial-mentoring work with *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, which exclusively publishes “born digital” media-rich scholarship, into undergraduate and graduate writing classes. This article describes how the process of editorial peer-review translates into students’ peer-review workshops in those same writing classes.

Introduction

For several years, I have been teaching an undergraduate (junior/senior-level) Multimodal Composition course using a genre-studies approach. I have redesigned this course many times (see Ball, Scofield, & Fenn, 2012), with the most recent instantiation bringing my work as editor of *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* into the classroom. *Kairos* is a digital writing studies journal that exclusively publishes digital media-based scholarship, and in my class, I ask students to compose “webtexts” (digital media-based articles) that they can potentially submit to an online journal like *Kairos*. Rather than asking students to reproduce “mutt genres” (Wardle, 2009) that only exist in the setting of academic, teacher-centered classrooms and never in the world outside of that 15- or 25-person writing class, I ask students to analyze the entire ecology in which webtexts exist and, then, produce a set of texts that are used in that ecology. It’s academic writing writ scholarly and multimodal *and* potentially publishable → writing that actually goes somewhere for students.

However, one of the things I discovered when I began using a genre-studies approach (see Ball, 2012; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2009) to this course was that I needed to create a method of assessing students’ webtexts that equally valued the constantly-shifting genre conventions of webtexts, my expertise (and time) as a teacher–editor, students’ everyday interests in digital media, the audiences and venues (e.g., editorial boards and scholars) that students’ work might actually reach, and students’ in-class peer-reviews of each others’ webtexts. It is this last item – peer-review – that I will focus on in this article. I won’t detail here strategies for assessing webtexts in and out of the classroom (see instead Ball, 2012; Kuhn, Johnson, & Lopez, 2010). I focus on how I ask students to take on the role of editorial board and to peer review their classmates’ projects. This assignment pulls directly from a rhetorical genre studies approach in which students are asked to produce writing assignments that have trajectory outside the writing classroom itself.

The Contingency of Webtexts and Assessment Criteria

In a typical semester, students have 7 weeks to learn what webtexts are (as a form of media-rich academic writing), how to read them, what venues¹ they are published in, who the audience for each sample journal is, and how the editorial boards of those journals evaluate webtext submissions (based on any criteria they list on their websites or through analysis of what the journals actually publish). Then students have another 7 weeks to

produce a collaborative webtext for potential submission to one of the journals we study. A week or two follows where we discuss revision strategies and submission practices. It's a packed 17-week semester that culminates in a webtext that may actually be in good enough shape to submit to a scholarly journal that publishes digital media. I have written elsewhere about the contingent nature of these submissions (see Ball, 2010; The Normal Group, 2012), and I ask authors and editorial board members to consider this as well. Webtexts, unlike print scholarship, tend to be less fixed in their initial submission state because authors often need significant editorial guidance through revision suggestions to make the design of the text work with the written content—a form::content issue as well as scholarly process still relatively new for most digital writing scholars (despite *Kairos's* now 16-year history publishing this kind of work). Digital media scholarship is still a new form of scholarly writing that requires it to be less stable (sometimes) upon submission than editors and editorial boards might expect, so that authors have the room to revise the piece based on feedback. And anyone who's ever composed a webtext knows that revising scholarly multimedia is waaay more complicated than revising print scholarship.

In the classroom, understanding the contingent nature of webtexts means that I had to change the standard by which I was assessing student work. It isn't feasible to judge students based on "excellence" or any other revise-until-perfect set of criteria for a finished webtext when authors for the journal can't produce perfect work in 17 weeks either. If my expectation for both student writers and first-time *Kairos* authors was a semi-finished webtext, why not have Revise and Resubmit² be the standard by which I assess the students' projects?³ Grading projects by expecting the *best* examples to be R&Rs is not lowering our standards; it's a practical reality of how the genre of a webtext exists in the world. Still, students in my multimodal classes for the first time can produce work that is on par with much of what first-time *Kairos* authors produce (and that's after we debunk the myth of the so-called "digital native" who already knows how to do everything with a computer). That students often produce work on par with scholars is a bar-raising standard in my editorial and pedagogical experience.

Of course, in the academic world of scholarly multimedia produced for a journal like *Kairos*, I am not responsible for grading work. Instead, I am responsible for deciding whether a webtext is ready for peer review (with the help of my staff), compiling the board's reviews of a webtext, making a judgement call if reviews are competing, and writing revision letters to the authors. Until a webtext is accepted for publication, I only guide the evaluation process. Translated into the classroom, student-authors are also the editorial board for their classmates' work. This isn't a new concept; it's a peer workshop with scholarly multimedia texts instead of papers (in a writing class). Other universities have taken up students-as-peer-reviewers in university-wide journals (see OSU's *Commonplace*, UNC's *PIT Journal*, and UT-Austin's *TheJUMP*), each with their own criteria for their (mostly linear, except *TheJUMP*) student work published in student-run online journals. In my case, students learn the genre(s) of scholarly multimedia in enough depth and expertise (just as editorial boards do) to judge the quality of their own and their classmates' work.

Peer Groups as Editorial Boards

On the one hand, peer review in a writing classroom has had a long, spotted history (see, e.g., DePardo & Freedman, 1988) with teachers often sharing anecdotes such as "it's a

chat-chat session,” “it doesn’t work,” “only the students who already know how to write do well,” and “all they focus on is grammar issues.” DePardo and Freedman remarked in their bibliographic essay on research into peer review that, often, too much teacher control over peer response (directing the class conversation, providing set rubrics for students to use on each others’ work, etc.) will be reflected in students’ attempts to mimic what they think teachers would say about a groupmates’ paper, and not in students’ more natural—and usually more expansive—responses in peer groups. “The tendency has been to undermine [students’] potential by channeling peer dynamics toward teacher-mandated guidelines, thereby subtracting from the process the crucial element of student empowerment and denying group members authority to become decisionmaking writers and readers” (p. 144). On the other hand, in a classroom where the genre is totally new to writers *and* is constantly in flux, some teacher mandates may be necessary, at least to help students explore the ecology of this shifting terrain.

In the definitive introduction to genre studies, Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff (2009) reminded teachers to “construct useful guideposts for navigating academic culture” by “demystifying classroom genres, like the teacher’s end comments on student papers, the student–teacher conference, writing assignment prompts, and the syllabus” (p. 198). Peer review – in or outside of the classroom – is definitely a genre that needs demystifying for student authors attempting to write for scholarly publication. Although *Kairos* uses a collaborative review process for its editorial board, which is similar to how many peer reviews are done in classroom settings, most editorial boards don’t work collaboratively, and – for many reasons⁴ – I ask students to follow the individual peer-review model, but that also meant that I needed to provide them with instructions for writing that genre since it’s not one you can easily research or find on the Internet given their private nature. Although this set of instructions on writing a peer-review letter is teacher-mandated (which DePardo & Freeman’s research indicated isn’t very useful in peer response groups), the criteria that I asked students to use to evaluate each others’ webtexts was completely open to them, based on a set of previous assignments we had conducted. (That assignment sequence and the assessment criteria students came up with is outlined in the precursor article to this one; see Ball, 2012.)

As an editor, it was odd to sit down and write explicit instructions on how to write a peer-review letter for three reasons. First, *Kairos* doesn’t have such instructions because of our collaborative, interactive review process which values informal as well as formal responses by any number of editorial board members in their area of expertise. (So, one might focus on the usability of the interface while another focuses on the literature review, and a third critiques the form::content). I have relied on the board to intuitively know how to review webtexts given that they already sit on the board, and those invitations are based on expertise in digital media and/or digital writing studies⁵. Second, in my years of reviewing for other journals, including print journals, I’ve only once received guidelines for reviewing a submission (and never for another online media-based journal, although my students have since discovered at least one set of guidelines for an online journal). So it wasn’t just *Kairos* that assumed the board knew what it was doing, whether for webtextual or print scholarship. Third, the implicit conventions of peer-review letters are surprisingly specific, and the process that surrounds the writing of a peer-review letter is surprisingly complex.

It took a long time to document this process and write the instructions because I had to keep re-assessing my own reading and writing strategies when I evaluate webtext submissions. My reflection on this process would glide over details I had internalized, such as how to take notes that would be useful in a peer-review letter while reading the webtext the first time through, or how long the review needed to be and to whom it should be addressed⁶. Overall, the instructions provided typical genre conventions for the structure and organization, audience(s), purpose and goals, context, style and tone, length, delivery medium, and use of evaluative criteria within the letter.⁷

[note to editor: I didn't have the actual assignment in here initially, just in the endnote #5 mentioned above. Delete it if you'd rather, but I figured it might be easier for readers to have it here. I wasn't sure whether space would be an issue?]

Peer-Review Assignment Sheet

Description:

A peer-review letter provides feedback to an author's in-progress (but hopefully nearly completed) work. The job of peer reviewers is (1) to read a text in relation to the values of a particular publication venue, the venue's audience, and the disciplinary conversations the audience/venue espouses, and (2) to provide constructive feedback to an author based on the text's effectiveness at reaching those values.

Goals:

- to refine your analytical skills using the value-laden criteria for multimodal scholarship that we have discussed in class
- to practice addressing your analysis to a specific audience (an editor, with a secondary audience of the authors)
- to understand the peer-review process that your major projects will go through (for assessment by your peers and myself and for potential evaluation by the journals, if submitted)

Instructions:

There are four parts to this assignment (for the Workshop version, skip #1), plus the annotation:

1. Pick a webtext that has been published in one of the journals you're most interested in. Two rules:
 - a. The webtext must have been published within the last two years. Why? Because disciplinary conversations can change rapidly in digital writing studies. (If you don't pick a recent webtext, I'll ask you to redo your letter with another choice that I approve. So make sure to follow this requirement.)
 - b. You cannot use a webtext that we've read in class or that you've discussed in previous assignments for this class — it has to be a new one for you. Why? Because I want to see where you stand in understanding how to transfer your genre and venue and audience analysis skills using the evaluation criteria to *new* situations/texts.
2. Situate yourself within the venue. If you haven't already done so, perform a Values Analysis [an assignment from earlier in the semester] on the venue in which the webtext is (to be) published. You'll need to read the webtext in relation to those values. Your role here is to function as a reviewer/editorial board member of the publication in which this piece has been published.
3. Read/review the webtext. With the values from that journal context (venue, audience, disciplinary conversations, etc.) AND the evaluation criteria we discussed in class in mind, read the webtext "generously" (meaning, give yourself some time to figure out how it works, why it works the way it does, and, if there are places in the text where you're not sure — or don't like — what an author has done, try to figure out what their reasoning for doing it that way was). Take

notes on how and why you react/respond to the piece as you read. You should use the evaluation criteria as touchstones for explaining how/why you read the piece as you did. Does, in other words, the piece meet the values/expectations/criteria? Does it miss anywhere? For all questions such as this, the questions “Why” and “How” will probably need to be addressed in your review letter. From your notes, figure out the main points you want to address in regards to the peer-review criteria, and begin to summarize your thoughts in relation to those criteria.

4. Write the review letter. Write a 2(ish) page, single-spaced letter (in a word-processing document) that will be given to the authors of the webtext. In this letter, you should discuss how the piece meets (or doesn't meet) the evaluation criteria we have been using all semester in class (you can use any formation of that criteria you'd like) as well as the values of the journal to which it's being submitted. The letter should be addressed to me (filling in as the “Editor” of the publication for which you are reviewing). The letter should be more formal than colloquial and should contain feedback for the author that is constructive and offers revision suggestions, if you have any (and you should have **some** revision suggestions). As a peer-reviewer, you are an expert in the field and are qualified to evaluate this piece of multimodal scholarship. Write from that voice/knowledge.

Some basic suggestions for drafting the letter:

- the beginning paragraph of the letter often summarizes the submission's purpose back to the editors/author, to ensure that you understood the piece and evaluated it with the criteria in mind; and
- remember that the editor of the publication is your audience but that the editor often sends your letter to the author, so the language should be helpful and respectful.
- how you use the criteria in your letter is up to you. Some reviewers address the criteria directly, and others do it implicitly. In any case, make sure that your revision suggestions are clear. **HOWEVER:** Using the criteria explicitly, as if writing a literary analysis where each paragraph starts by listing and defining one criterion and then points to examples of the text that (don't) exemplify that criterion is **NOT** very professional. A peer-review letter shouldn't look or sound like a literary (or rhetorical) analysis; that is not an appropriate genre for you to uptake/use for this assignment.

Annotation Instructions

For this part of the assignment, I want you to reflect on your peer-review letter written to your classmates by annotating the specific places where you drew on the evaluation criteria you chose when reviewing their piece. Each time you use a criteria (or if you introduced a **NEW** criteria in your reading), say **WHY** you thought it was important to address for the particular piece you were reviewing and **HOW** it got at a specific critique (or good point) you wanted the authors to know about. In essence, this annotation is a meta-reflection of your peer-review letter that will show me that you understand how and why we came up with the sets of criteria we did (from earlier in the semester), how you can apply them to an actual webtext, and will help you think about how you would continue to create new criteria for evaluating different kinds of texts in future writing scenarios (either in or out of class). So, show me what you know ;)

As indicated in the above assignment description, students complete this peer-review assignment 2-3 times in a typical semester—first on an already-published or in-progress webtext (if I have one available with the author's permission), which they usually have to revise at least once. Then they do another peer-review on their classmates' webtexts at the end of the term, which also includes a self-assessment annotation of their letter (for me/teacher as audience). To prep for the initial peer-review assignment, I try to take most of a three-hour class period to read an example webtext as it looked upon initial submission. Then I ask students to review the actual peer-review letters from the venue's editorial board and ask students to write a resubmittal letter to the journal editor—as if they were the authors of the webtext and had to follow the review advice. This process

allowed them to see a model of a peer-review letter, which students could analyse for genre conventions from the kinds of journals they would be submitting to. For instance, a venue like *Kairos* tends to have peer-review letters that are more helpful/mentoring than angry/gatekeeping, with the former being my teacherly goal for students in a writing class as well as my editorial goal for the field at large. Using these samples, I also discuss with students how to interpret revision comments, as they would later have to do with their own work, and figure out which revisions were required and which were merely suggested.

After that analysis, we try to look at the published piece (if it has, in fact, been published) so that students can see the sometimes-radical revision a webtext has undergone based on the editorial board's feedback. One semester, I asked students to read a piece I had co-authored in *Kairos* (RiceBall, 2006), which came with a set of "behind-the-scenes" scholarly process genres including the original submission which the editor asked us to revise and resubmit, the two editorial review letters (one Accept, one Reject), and a hand-drawn prototype of the piece's redesign. Another semester, I asked students to assess a webtext being considered in a digital book collection I was co-editing. I knew the webtext needed revision, and it had already been revised twice by one of its authors in preparation for the book publication, but it still wasn't quite right. I was stuck on what to recommend to the authors, in part because they were my students from a previous semester, and I was too close to their work, in which they proposed that teachers needed to pay better attention to using digital technologies in their classrooms. So I asked my current students to each write a peer-review letter for this video, and they summarily pointed out that the authors needed to include more interviews and footage from teachers who could speak more clearly to the issue of teaching with technology, as well as to list on screen the names and affiliations of the people being interviewed. These revision suggestions were exactly what the piece needed to make its purpose and credibility more effective. Afterwards, students were excited to learn that their revision suggestions would be implemented by the author, and the video came out publication-ready (see *The Normal Group*, 2012, for this video).

I assessed these peer reviews based on their adherence to the genre conventions we covered in class as well as those outlined in the assignment. This process required students to get into the heads of their potential audience—the review board—and use the criteria that the board would use to offer useful feedback. What surprised me was how accurate, and expert, the peer-review letters were in relation to the revisions that I (or an editorial board member) would suggest based on our experience working with webtexts. After spending seven or so weeks discussing how and why webtexts work, what audiences expect from webtexts, and what the journals value based on example editorial review letters and published webtexts, the students were able to provide specific, thoughtful revisions that had depth – they had become experts in analyzing and evaluating multimodal scholarship.

Even in the cases where students didn't get quite the genre of the peer review letter down the first time, their revision suggestions are usually quite good, and they revised this version of the letter before having to repeat the process later in the semester with their classmates' texts. I also ask students to consider as they wrote these letters how they would integrate the assessment criteria into the letters. We'd discussed at length how the editorial board of journals like *Kairos* have no set criteria, and so criteria (if stated at all) are often used implicitly in most professional peer-review letters where the framework for assessment is more subtle than a rubric would suggest. Most of the students did a great job

of discretely using whatever evaluative framework they created in their letters, although a few always stumble on this aspect of the genre, mistakenly drawing on inappropriate antecedent genres, or what Elizabeth Wardle (2008) called *mutt genres*, where students' letters sound more like rhetorical "academic essays" defined by blunt naming of the criteria followed by an example from the text. Once I point out this incorrect uptake and ask them to revise their initial letter, they don't repeat the mistake for the second letter.

Peer-Review Example

For the webtext assignment, students have to choose which section in which journal they will submit. Sometimes it's difficult for authors to recognize the subtle differences between different sections in the same journal, and student-authors are no different. For instance, some *Kairos* submissions walk a fine line in their suitability for the Topoi section versus the Praxis section. The Topoi section, as the submission guidelines state, publishes "extended scholarly analyses of large-scale issues relating to rhetoric, technology, and pedagogy." These guidelines are purposefully a little vague, to invite scholarly experimentation, but generally speaking this section draws on *topoi* in digital writing studies for its content. The Praxis section, on the other hand, "publishes scholarly investigations into the intersections of rhetoric, technology, and pedagogy discovered through teaching and other professional practices" ("Submissions," #sections). That is, the Praxis section focuses exclusively on pedagogy and *praxis* while the Topoi section may be pedagogical, but often doesn't include praxis. Depending on how much classroom-situating authors do in their webtexts, they often question which section to submit to, and the editorial board has been known to suggest an author revise out of one section and into another.

In this peer-review example, a student drew on a venue-specific definition of audience to critique the section placement of another group's webtext. That is, the project was intended to be submitted to one section of a journal, but the reviewer believed that it was more suitable to another section of the journal. At *Kairos*, this kind of critique usually happens earlier in the process before the board reviews a piece, but occasionally the board makes this suggestion instead. In completing the peer-review assignment's instructions to take on the values of the journal to which a group was submitting, students had to learn what each journal (and each section in the journal) valued. In many cases, this meant that before students wrote the peer-review letters for another group's project, they had to research how the assessment criteria we'd created in class aligned with a *different* section or journal than the one their own group was submitting to. Although several students made note of some projects' incorrect placement to a particular section, one student in particular went out of his way to explain this issue in the peer-review letter:

Let me now return back to my comment on the audience of this video. I understand that the target audience/journal is going to be the "Inventio" section of *Kairos*. However, I do not think this video fits into that section of the journal. Inventio's mission is as follows: "As we envision it, Inventio authors will be able to include, alongside or integrated with their finished webtexts, materials that help them articulate how and why their work came into being." As it stands now, there is no existence of this [process stated] within this text, however, if the plan is to include something of that nature, then kudos. If not, then I think a better fit for this video

would be the "Topoi" section of *Kairos* because the video is doing an analysis of a commercial....

This student reviewer was neither submitting to Inventio nor Topoi, so he had to learn the requirements for two sections (and two audiences) beyond his own. Half of the reviewers (2 out of 4) brought up the section-placement discrepancy, which surprised me because section placement can be one of the most difficult (and most overlooked) criteria to evaluate in an unstable/unfinished webtext. As editor, I know from experience that our sections can often seem overlapping – while not typical, it happens often enough that we switch a webtext’s section days or weeks before publication – so that we are creating stopgaps for catching and moving these texts in our submission and copy-editing process to avoid reader confusion upon publication. Thus, I was extremely pleased that students who had had to analyze the journal sections earlier in the semester and again as they wrote the reviews were able to transfer astutely their knowledge of this criteria to evaluate the audience/section fit for other students’ webtexts.

Contingency and Trajectory

It’s more important that students can assess each others’ work as demonstrated through the peer-review letters than it is for me to assess their work, which is why I have not provided my own reading of students’ webtexts. Stepping out of the process requires students to be fully *in* the peer-review process, and allows them the flexibility (within the genre conventions) to say what needs to be said. Following this trajectory, and because I don’t grade authors’ submissions, I also don’t grade students individual or collaborative assignments throughout the semester. Instead of my grading the webtexts or individual assignments like the peer review, I can step back and offer guidance, not judgement, in these risk-intensive assignments. So long as students meet the minimum webtext-submission requirements that authors must also meet for whichever journal students choose to use as their submission venue, I feel that they’ve satisfied the project goals and requirements. However, students – just like authors – sometimes fail to meet those minimum requirements, which is then reflected in the student’s course grade (or an author’s rejection).

Until I thought through the valuation process for scholarly multimedia with students, I had some ad-hoc ways for thinking about how my own and others’ scholarly multimedia texts worked, much of which I have picked up along the way or intuited from I don’t know where. Every time I encounter a new set of students or a new submission to *Kairos*, I have to add to, rethink, reorganize, remix my personal, invisible heuristic for evaluating scholarly multimedia. It’s the same question I’ve been wrestling with for over a decade since I had to come to terms with how I would read and evaluate Adrian Miles’ (2003) *Violence of Text* submission to *Kairos* (see Ball, 2004). And so it’s why I continue to ask students to assess, evaluate, and re/create not only as they proceed through the semester but after they leave my class.

At the end of the semester, I ask students to take the peer-review letters they’ve written for others in class and annotate them. In other words, after telling them all semester to make their criteria implicit in their revision suggestions, I ask them to reverse-engineer that process and make the criteria explicit again, through the Comment feature in their word-processing program. I ask them to annotate the specific criteria that they wanted to address, why they thought it was important to point out that criteria in their revision

comment at that point in the letter, and how the criteria helped them articulate a specific critique of or revision strategy for the webtext. In essence, this annotation is a self-assessment of their peer-review letters⁸. It shows me that the students understand how and why we came up with the sets of criteria we did, how they apply to an actual webtext, and how students could continue to create new criteria for analysing and evaluating different kinds of texts in future writing scenarios.

References

- Ball, Cheryl E. (2004). Show, not tell: The value of new media scholarship. *Computers & Composition*, 21, 403–425.
- Ball, Cheryl E. (2012). Assessing scholarly multimedia: A rhetorical genre studies approach. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 21, 61-77.
- Ball, Cheryl E.; Scofield, Tia; & Fenn, Tyrell. (2012). Genre and Transfer in a Multimodal Composition Class
- Bawarshi, Anis, & Reiff, Mary Jo. (2009). *Genre: An introduction to history, theory, research, and pedagogy*. WAC Clearinghouse/Parlor Press.
- DePardo, Anne, & Freedman, Sarah Warshauer. (1988). Peer response groups in the writing classroom: Theoretic foundations and new directions. *Review of Educational Research*, 58 (2), 119-149. Doi: 10.3102/00346543058002119.
- Kuhn, Virginia; Johnson, DJ; and Lopez, David. (2010). Speaking with students: Profiles in digital pedagogy. *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, 14(2). Retrieved March 9, 2001, from <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/14.2/interviews/kuhn/index.html>
- The Normal Group. (2012). Talking Back to Teachers: Undergraduate Multimodal Research. In Debra Journet, Cheryl E. Ball, and Ryan Trauman (Eds.) *The New Work of Composing*. Computers and Composition Digital Press.
- [RiceBall] Rice, Rich, & Ball, Cheryl E. (2006). Reading the text: Remediating the text. *Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy*, 10(2). Retrieved September 1, 2008, from <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/10.2/binder2.html?coverweb/riceball/index.html>
- Shipka, Jody. (2009). Negotiating Rhetorical, Material, Methodological, and Technological Difference: Evaluating Multimodal Designs. *College Composition and Communication*, 61(1), W343–W366.
- Submissions: Where to Submit. (n.d.). *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*. Retrieved November 29, 2011, from <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/submissions.html#sections>
- Wardle, Elizabeth. (2009). “Mutt genres” and the goal of FYC: Can we help students Write the genres of the university? *College Composition and Communication*, 60(4), 765-789.

1 In the most recent semester, we studied *Kairos*, *TheJUMP*, *C&C Online*, *Enculturation*, *Harlot of the Arts*, and *X/changes*.

2 Since readers of this article are most likely encountering this piece in a closed-access (e.g., subscribers only), peer-reviewed journal, I'm going to assume that you are scholars—an audience that understands what a journal's editorial review process is—and that I can move on to the assignment itself without describing how peer review in a journal functions.

3 I am specifically avoiding using the word grading in this article since I do not provide students with grades throughout the semester. For a full discussion of my “grading” scale, please see <http://www.ceball.com/classes/239/fall11/about/>

4 Some of the reasons I ask students to write individual reviews instead of collaborative reviews of each others’ webtexts include the following

- It gives every student the opportunity to write a response, and, thus, students also receive several, lengthy responses. (Undergraduate students always work in groups on their webtext projects.)
- It helps me see how well individual students are learning their analysis and evaluative literacy practices (particularly with multimodal texts, which is the point of my classes) and putting those into practice in writing.
- Students can revise their peer review letters if I think they need more work, which also raises the stakes on providing useful, expert feedback for a successful letter.
- Written responses provide exact revision suggestions for future reference by authors (and the teacher or editor).
- It’s easier (for me) to provide individual opportunities/time to review the webtexts than to coordinate collaborative reviews.

5 One major (and unexpected) outcome of this peer-review assignment, after I bragged to some friends who happen to be editorial board members about how good students’ peer-review letters were, resulted in them asking me for more explicit instructions on reviewing Kairos submissions. We brainstormed, and I sent the heuristic to the board’s listserv shortly thereafter. Since then, the level and quality of participation by reviewers has increased enormously.

6 Some of these conventions change depending on the editorial mantle that is taken up--that is, a review from a board member of Kairos might have a totally different feel and conventions than a review letter from a board member of Enculturation. I primarily offered students Kairos-based letters written to or by me, so that I could discuss the implications of revision suggestions made by board members and editors, and how I dealt with those revisions as an author, since authoring was a major component of the class.

7 An example of the peer-review letter instructions for the Multimodal Composition class can be found here: <http://www.ceball.com/classes/239/fall11/major-assignments/peer-review/>

8 In this respect, the meta-reflection on the peer-review letters is similar to Shipka’s SGOs, although the assignment that my students are reflecting on isn’t highly mediated, which is the point of Shipka’s use of the SGOs. In other words, I don’t discount the use of reflections; I just don’t find them useful in direct application to the multimodal texts themselves.