

The Dunlap Method: A Reader-Response Writing Group Process
Prepared by Carole Woodall
Based on the method used by CU-Writing Across the Disciplines group

Background

The Critical Peer Review Process is an important element to get students engaged in a writing process. While at UCCS, I have developed various methods to get students engaged in the act of critical peer reviewing, or talking about writing. I had been using a series of questions to direct students in the critical peer review process. However, I have found that a list of questions, albeit directed, was not giving students the language to talk about writing.

CU-Writing Across the Disciplines group uses a process adapted from Louise Dunlap's *Undoing the Silence: Six Tools for Social Change Writing* (2007). In the Dunlap model, one member of the group presents only two pages of writing each week, and the feedback process follows a series of steps. The feedback process is based on Peter Elbow's *Writing with Power* (1981) method of reader-based feedback that "gives you the main thing you need to improve your writing: the experience of what it felt like for readers as they were reading your words" (p. 245). For more than 20 years, Dunlap has led writing groups based on Elbow's reader-based feedback, and has optimized a group process doing this.

Approach

I have modified the reader-response approach for an undergraduate classroom at the lower and upper divisions. A discussion begins with who is a critical peer reviewer, and what is a critical peer review. Students discuss what they have experienced in other classes, and the kind of comments they typically give to their colleagues. Then, I discuss the Dunlap method, and the reasons for not using a question-based critical peer review feedback form. The modified version is as follows:

Preliminaries

Writer passes out copies of part of a piece. In large classes, I have students pass out the two opening paragraphs, and put them in groups of three. Ideally, a group should consist of at least four, but it depends on class size. The writer then addresses the following questions to the group:

1. How does the writer feel about this piece?
2. Is there a particular idea that the writer is attempting to address?
3. Are there specific issues that the writer wants the readers to think about?

Reading Aloud

Then, the writer reads the piece aloud. Readers follow and make notes on their copies if they wish and prepare to answer the following questions.

Writer Asks Reader

Writer asks the following question, moving around the response circle to get an answer from each person. During this process, the writer attempts to be only a facilitator, while

encouraging readers to say whatever they feel. Readers should try to be spontaneous, genuine, and mention associations.

1. What words and phrases stand out for you? While the writer is reading the piece aloud, circle the words or phrases that stand out. The reader will then repeat these words to the writer.
2. Give a quick summary from memory of what you think/feel the writer is saying. This should be in your own words and organized in your own way.
3. Tell the story of your reading process. Here you can take more time to try to give the writer more detailed account of your associations, questions, or confusions.
4. Give a metaphor for what the writing feels like to you.

Ideally, the writer is supposed to respond at the end of the process. However, liberty can always be given to the writer if there is a need to respond. This method needs to be repeated over the course of the semester, as the first time is always a bit awkward. The result is that students begin to feel more comfortable talking critically about the writing process.