

## Sideshadowing: A Strategy for getting good peer response

Learning to identify strengths, weaknesses, gaps, and the potential of your own writing is a really valuable skill to develop. Most of you, when you are writing, are probably thinking things like “this idea isn’t very well developed yet,” “I really like this section because...” or, “I really need to do more research on \_\_\_\_\_” .

**Sideshadowing**, or simply writing in the margins of your own paper, is a writing strategy that is intended to help you get those comments into your draft so that readers know more about what you are/were thinking as you were writing. Sideshadowing is a strategy that is meant to get you the kind of feedback you want—specific feedback on specific elements in your paper.

Like any writing strategy, sideshadowing will take practice, and it will take commitment on the part of the writer and reader. We will use this strategy whenever we do peer reviews in this class—I encourage you to use it whenever you ask someone to give you feedback on a paper.

### **Writers: sideshadow your own texts**

- Make marginal comments (or insert comments as you write) in your own text before giving it to peer reviewers.
- Create questions to pose to your own drafts, questions you would like readers to think about and answer.
- Don’t ask “is this good?” or “is this clear?” Tell your readers why you *think* a paragraph or a section is good, but why you are unsure, or why you think a paragraph might be unclear or in need of help.
- Insert the ideas, possibilities, and uncertainties that you were not able to put down on the page.

### **Peer reviewers: consider early drafts as *sites of possibility***

- Identify ideas, sources, story threads, images, etc. that could be developed.
- Limit your use of directional comments (“you should do X”).
- Confine editing comments to near final drafts.
- Generally help the writer expand and see possibilities, rather than contract and focus right away. Help the writer see how a real reader responds.

### **Peer response prompts readers can use for end comments**

- I like . . .
- I am unclear about . . .
- I have questions about . . .
- You might try . . .

Sideshadowing is a response technique meant to create dialogue among students, and between students and instructors. You are welcome to modify the strategies, but I strongly encourage all of you to take active steps towards getting good feedback.

Source: Welch, Nancy. “Sideshadowing Teacher Response.” *College English* 60 (1998): 374-95.

## Examples of good sideshadowing questions.

Good sideshadowing questions should identify a problem you recognize in your own writing, and then it should be asked for feedback, suggestions, or specific evaluations.

1. My title is too bland—any suggestions?
2. I am having \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) trouble with my introduction, what can you suggest?
3. I think my tone shifts on page 3: did you notice the shift, and how can I fix it?
4. I have a tendency to over-use the passive voice. Did you notice me doing that in this paper? Where ?
5. I am not sure I supported my thesis (or dominant impression) strongly enough: what kinds of additional evidence do you think I could use?
6. I don't feel like I am really bringing my subject to life—any suggestions for making this profile more lively?
7. My ending just repeats everything I have said. How can I make it more interesting?

Kevin Brooks 6/13/09 8:12 AM

**Comment:** Sideshadowing can be done electronically (like this) by  
 1. Highlighting a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph you want to respond to.  
 2. Clicking on "Insert" and then "Comment" or perhaps using the sticky note icon.  
 3. Writing your comment the sticky note provided.

### §SIDESHADOWING TEACHER RESPONSE

In fact, when Bill gave me his draft, it looked like this, the marginal comments, brackets, and arrows from Bill's reading, Bill's pen:

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | Like anything else, traveling by bus has advantages and   |   |
| effect of listing advantages first?                                  | drawbacks. First the advantages. . . . But undoubtedly the gem of my 300 hours of Greyhound experience was a beefy spoonful of an entirely different reality than I had   | hard time finding snippet that would summarize exp. for title |
|  | been accustomed to and more importantly [a reshuffling of ideas that I have about my growth process. . . .  |   |
| implies change has been drastic when in reality has been more subtle | At this time this conception of a bus station struck me as . . . something taken from a Ginsberg poem . . . an infallible recipe for a radical transformation] of my sheltered racial and economic ideologies. In retrospect, I |   |
|  | see my first four cross country trips as a [desperate attempt] to escape, not to grow. . . . I was anxious  | tendency of using phrases too strong                          |
| struggled with how personal, vulnerable wanted to be                 | whenever I wasn't high, terrified of the people that surrounded me, but was unable to act any differently. I  |   |
|  | spent the majority of my cross-country trips alone, depressed and afraid. I had begun to sense that the   | too much self criticism, not enough describing                |
| don't think advantages/drawbacks what I want to talk about           | "road life" I was leading would have been a failure in Kerouac's eyes. Another major pitfall of bus travel . . .  |   |