# *TechMatters*: Peer to "Peergrade": Exploring an Online Tool to Facilitate Peer Evaluation

## Krista Graham, Georgia State University

From written comments to face-to-face meetings, and group discussions to graded tests, when it comes to assessing learning and providing meaningful instructor feedback to students we, as instructors, have many choices. One option that can be very effective is peer evaluation where students provide feedback, and perhaps even grades, on the work of their classmates. When students engage in peer assessment activities they have the opportunity to flex their critical thinking skills, gain practical experience in providing constructive criticism to colleagues, and learn to identify areas for improvement in their own work by identifying and describing the successes and missteps made by others (Peergrade, 2017). Peergrade (https://www.peergrade.io/) is an online tool designed to make it easier for instructors to setup and manage this type of assessment.

## Getting Started

As an instructor, in order to use Peergrade you will need to setup an account which will allow you to sign-up for either a "basic" or "pro" version of the tool. "Peergrade Basic" is free but still fairly feature rich, and will allow you to create an unlimited number of assignments for an unlimited number of students. The "Pro" version will, for $99/year, give you access to additional functionality including the ability to upload files, assign weights to questions and assignments, and allow students to submit assignments as a group.

To create an account, click on the "Get Started" button, and indicate whether you are a teacher or a student. When you choose "I'm a Teacher" you will be prompted to provide your name, email, address, and school name (or you can "Sign up with Google"), and then create a password. You are then prompted to let Peergrade know what subject you teach, typical age range of your students, and where you learned about Peergrade.

## Create an Assignment

The first step in the Peergrade process is to create an assignment for your students. Unless you are going to run a "live session" (a feature that is still in beta and will likely require a Pro license), you must associate your assignment with a "class" that you create by simply providing a course name (e.g., class title and institution). From the "Class Overview" page, click on the blue "Create Assignment" button which will take you to a very straightforward template that will step you through the process of entering your assignment into the system.

First, you will provide a title and optional description for the assignment which you can do either by typing directly into the online form or by uploading a file. Then, in order to aid student review, and help to establish a level of consistency in the evaluations, each assignment in Peergrade requires a rubric which you establish by identifying broad evaluation categories (called "sections" in the system) and then adding "questions" to each one. The system allows three types of rubric questions: yes/no, scale, and text response. For each question, you can indicate how many points it is worth, whether student evaluator comments are mandatory and whether or not a question is optional (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Creating a "question" using Peergrade's rubric design interface**



Your final step is to set the dates for the assignment, establishing the open and close dates for both the period of time when students can submit the assignment and the later period when they can enter their feedback. Upon completion you will be taken to the assignment dashboard (see Figure 2). From here you can view and edit your assignment and rubric. In the "Settings" tab for each assignment, you will be able indicate the format(s) that you will accept for student submissions (e.g., pdf, docx, links, Google Docs, rich text), the number of peer assign-

ments each student will need to evaluate (the default is three), and (if you are a Pro user) whether student assignments may be submitted by individuals or by groups. You will also find a variety of additional options such as the ability to assign weights to rubric questions, allow students to view the rubric before submitting, and the option to disable anonymous review. Once underway, you will also come here to manage submissions, as well as view and monitor feedback including responding to requests for instructor review (if you have enabled flagging to allow students to indicate disagreement with feedback they have received).

### Add Course Participants

In order for students to access assignments, they need to be added to the course. To do so, select "Participants" from the course sidebar. From here you can add students and/or additional instructors to your class. Participants can be added individually by entering a name and email address, and indicating their type (i.e., student or teacher). When they are added, an email is sent inviting them to sign-up. Alternately, you can add participants in bulk using either a list or via a class code. The latter option generates a unique code that students will be prompted to enter after choosing "I'm a Student" from the "Get Started" section of the site.

### The Student Experience

After you invite your students to join your class, and they create accounts, they will be taken to an assignment overview page. Here they will be able to view both their active and inactive assignments for the course.

Once the "submission" period opens for an assignment, a green "Submit" button will become available. Students can submit their work either by providing a link or uploading a file. Until the "submission" period ends, students can change their submission by remove the previous file and uploading a new one.

When the peer grading period opens, a "Give Feedback" button will become active. After accessing and reading their peer's assignment(s), students can start giving feedback using the rubric that the instructor has developed for them. If the assignment requires self-evaluation, students will be prompted to do so only after giving feedback to their peers. Unless instructors have indicated otherwise, all feedback is anonymous. As with submissions, students can edit feedback up until the closing deadline.

Once the peer grade deadline has past, students may view and evaluate the feedback that they received from their peers. The "feedback reaction" form prompts students to rate the overall quality of the feedback (e.g., a range from "Not at all useful" to "Extremely useful, constructive and justified"), and then provides them with the opportunity to indicate the specific evaluation categories (i.e., Constructivity [sic], Specificity, Kindness, Justification, and Relevance) that could be improved and suggestions for how to do so. If enabled in the assignment set-

**Figure 2: Peergrade's assignment dashboard**
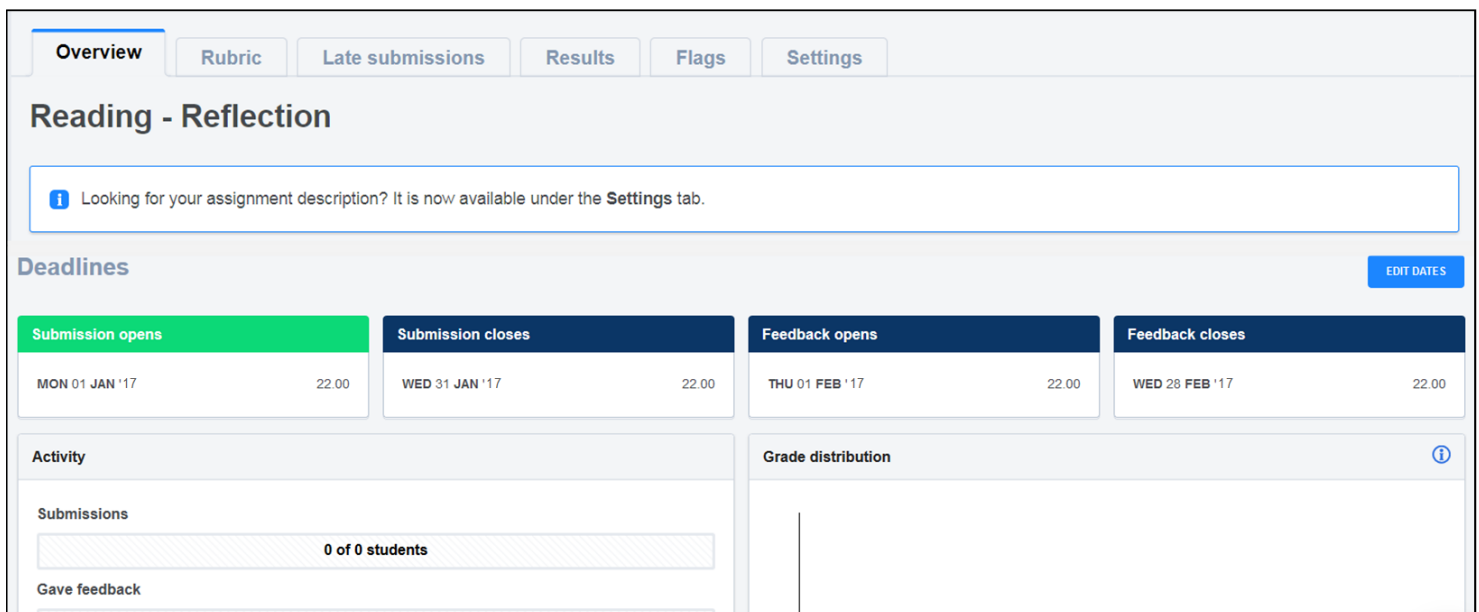
tings, students can also "flag" sections of the peer feedback with which they disagree thereby requesting review by the instructor. The instructor, upon their review, can add a comment about the feedback and if they concur that the original feedback was flawed, they can "override" the original response and it will be replaced.

## Conclusion

Despite the potential benefits to student learning, setting up an effective and manageable peer evaluation system can be challenging. On a purely practical level, managing the process to ensure that everyone gives and receives feedback can be difficult, especially for large groups or classes. Because assignment submission, redistribution, and peer feedback with Peergrade are all handled online and largely automated, instructors can focus their attention on ensuring that students provide and receive high quality feedback, rather than on the administrative tasks typically involved in managing this type of assessment. In addition, Peergrade provides instructors with helpful analytics all in one place, such as how students performed both individually and overall (according to the peer reviewers).

In order for a peer review process to be successful, assessment criteria needs to be clearly defined, and students need to be coached on how to provide meaningful commentary. Since all assessments in Peergrade are rubric-based, instructors have the opportunity to clearly express the criteria and standards to be used when evaluating student work. Furthermore, the system is flexible enough to allow the creation of an exemplar assignment so that students can practice giving constructive feedback prior to engaging in the process with their classmates.

The effectiveness of peer assessment can by hampered by issues of bias (friends give friends good grades) due to peer pressure or fear of retaliation. In order for students to trust in the process, and provide accurate feedback, procedures need to be established to minimize these problems. Peergrade addresses them by randomly and anonymously distributing assessments to students for evaluation. Further, by allowing students to challenge feedback with which they disagree, requesting review and revaluation by their instructor, student confidence in the fairness of the process can be increased.

Although technology alone cannot fully address these challenges, the Peergrade system goes a long way towards mitigating many of the issues that instructors face in implementing a quality peer evaluation assignment. Give it a try, and I think you'll find that it is a useful tool for administering meaningful peer review assessments in support of student learning.

## References

Peergrade. (2017). *Get started with Peergrade.* Retrieved from Peergrade: https://app.peergrade.io/courses? onboarding=1

---

## Dance

Since 2014, the fine arts librarian has also offered information literacy workshops to several dance courses. Three of these occur at least annually and are requirements for graduation under both of the dance major degree programs at WMU. The current curriculum provides sequential information literacy instruction to dance majors as freshmen, as sophomores, and as juniors/seniors. In 2016, as was done with theatre classes, librarians aligned the lessons for each course with the *Framework*.

The information literacy session in DANC 1000 - First Year Performance, designed in collaboration with faculty, addresses the frames of "Searching as Strategic Exploration," and "Authority is Constructed and Contextual." The students come to the library for a workshop during their regular class period and are introduced to the task of finding high-quality dance-related video materials, reviews, and articles. Students learn how to search for materials that are important to the professional development of dancers, such as audio and video material, techniques for searching for reviews, and how to find guidance on creating citations according to MLA style. This is accompanied by a discussion of techniques for evaluating sources. As part of this one-shot workshop during class, students complete an online assessment of their knowledge of information literacy concepts and receive individual feedback from the fine arts librarian.

DANC 2450 - Ballet History, is usually taken during the sophomore year. Students write a short research paper on a ballet history topic that they choose from a list of pre-approved topics identified by their professor. This course, although it is taught by the dance department, focuses on topics of historical method and interpretation; for this reason, the information literacy concepts are similar to those commonly taught for other history courses. The information literacy session with the librarian helps students learn techniques for gathering and evaluating information to begin their research projects, addressing the frame "Searching as Strategic Exploration." The session focuses on teaching stu-