

Requesting writing feedback

To get the most from critique of your writing, it's important to be specific in your requests.

Give a context for the writing

No writing is written in a vacuum; it all sits within a particular context (e.g. the first section of a methodology chapter; the rationale section from a research proposal, etc). To allow effective critique, it's important for the writer to:

- identify which section the text is from, for example:
 - which chapter of the thesis or exegesis?
 - which section of a journal article? etc.
- state what the text is trying to do, for example, is it:
 - moving an argument forward?
 - summarizing a section of the literature review?
 - discussing data in a table? etc.

Think about what type of feedback would be helpful

This helps those critiquing your writing to focus on particular elements. Be as specific as you can, but also be realistic: a writing group is not a place for your text to be fully edited and proofread. Feedback requested could be, for example, at the:

- macro and middle levels (ideas, structure, paragraphing, transitions, flow, etc)
- micro level (eg academic style, sentence structure, grammar, etc).

Be specific about the feedback you want

Breaking it down into really specific elements means you'll get a range of ideas about issues in your writing that you're having problems with. Ask your readers specific questions, for example:

- Is this concept clear?
- Does this presentation of the data work?
- Do these sub-headings make logical sense?
- Have I developed the argument strongly?
- I tend to use repetition – can you help me find where I've done this?
- When you read the abstract, do you have a clear idea about my research?

Look at these examples of feedback requests. Decide if the request is specific enough to receive constructive feedback or too general.

	Just right	Too general
I'd like you to tell me if the ideas in the introduction are clearly linked.		
Tell me if the abstract indicates the gap in the research.		
Can you read this and let me know what you think?		
Is the relationship between previous research and my research clear in this paragraph?		
Can you fix my grammar?		
I'm now ready to explain the methodology. Do you think I sound experienced and thorough? Would you trust my work?		
Can you tell me if I have explained the ideas of X clearly?		

Also identify what you *don't* want the group to focus on, for example:

- I'll fix the referencing later so don't worry about that.
- Don't worry about the grammar or style so much – I'm more interested in how well I've developed the argument.

And don't forget to bring in the HARD bits...

- Don't bring in the sections you're already happy with, or the things you've already published or your supervisor has looked at. This might make you look good but won't help you with the real issue.

Bring in the bits you're struggling with and that are frustrating you.

This is hard, but rewarding.



Image source: Microsoft images