Regardless of how you deliver descriptive feedback, consider asking students to engage in self-assessment prior to receiving your feedback. Students' reflecting on their work increases the likelihood that they will understand your feedback and act on it. This is an example of *accessing prior knowledge*, which helps students make sense of new information and retain it longer. In addition, it communicates that they have an equal responsibility in thinking about quality. It teaches students that their opinions are welcomed and respected. And, when students speak first, you are better able to identify misconceptions and target comments to what they can't figure out for themselves.

Offering Feedback with a Scoring Rubric

Make sure you have introduced the language of the rubric (Strategy 1) in advance of using it to offer feedback. Students will understand your comments better if you have also given them practice with Strategy 2, evaluating strong and weak anonymous samples, which helps them internalize the concepts of quality described in the rubric.

If your students aren't used to expressing their thoughts about their work before hearing from you, let them know in advance that you will be asking them to do so. Some students don't like surprises—you want this to be a challenge they are comfortable attempting.

Peer Feedback

In a study of the effects of peer- and self-assessment on science achievement, White and Frederiksen (1998) found that the process of coming to understand the criteria by which their work would be judged and learning to apply it to their own and to others' work benefited all students and worked to narrow the achievement gap between low- and high-achieving students. (See Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4 for a summary of White and Frederiksen's study.)

Although finding time for students to give feedback to each other can be difficult, several learning advantages make it worth the effort. First, when students practice constructing descriptive feedback for their peers, they deepen their own understanding of quality. Second, if students are trained to recognize and describe features of quality, they can offer valuable constructive critiques to each other, which lightens your load as a teacher. Third, some students are more relaxed and receptive to feedback from a peer, who is not in the position of "expert" that you occupy. Fourth, because they themselves are engaged in completing the assignment, students can often come up with strategies for tackling problems their peers are struggling with. Fifth, after conferring with a

peer, they are more likely to attempt to view their work through another's eyes, which can trigger new thoughts and insights into what to rework. And last, it taps into the advantages that social interaction can contribute to learning.

White and Frederiksen (1998) describe two prerequisites to engaging students in peer feedback activities, based on their studies of reflective assessment (peer- and self-assessment) in the science classroom:

1. All participants must understand that it is performance that is being rated, not people, where performance is what you actually do, not what you are capable of doing.

2. Students must be given the means to understand how to do well in their performances; otherwise performance ratings may be damaging to students.

> These caveats relate to a very serious issue: Reflective assessment [peer- and self-assessment] can be seen as a performance evaluation if it occurs in an instructional context that teaches students how to carry out good inquiry projects. However, if the process of producing a high-quality project is mysterious to students, they are likely to fall back on an ability attribution for the assessment results, that is, on the belief that they are not "smart enough" to do well in science. There is a clear equity issue here as well, because failure to provide both an understanding of the assessment criteria and of how to perform well may be particularly damaging to less-advantaged students who, without a clear understanding of how highly rated work is produced, are likely to invoke the damaging theory of performance as a reflection of their ability. So, reflective assessment should not be added on to a curriculum, rather it should be an integral part of a curriculum that scaffolds the development of the skills being assessed. (pp. 79–80)

Scaffolding a Peer Feedback Conference

You can teach students to give feedback to each other by having them practice in a controlled setting. Limiting the variables "scaffolds" the experience so they can focus on mastering the basics first.

One way to accomplish this is to have them engage in a three-minute conference simulation with a partner, in which they take turns playing the roles of student and teacher. Select two anonymous samples of student work that each fall in the midrange of quality, illustrating strengths and areas needing attention for the aspect or aspects of quality you want students to focus on in their own works in progress. Label the samples "Student A" and "Student B." If students

do not already have a copy of the scoring rubric they will use to practice giving feedback with, prepare a copy for each one. They will also each need a copy of the Assessment Dialogue form in Figure 3.13 or 3.14 and scratch paper. Then follow this process:

1. Ask students to find a partner. The person with the longer fingers is "Partner A." The other person is "Partner B." Tell students that for the first activity, "Partner A" is the student and "Partner B" is the teacher.
2. Hand out (or ask them to take out) the scoring rubric. If it is a multi-trait rubric, direct their attention to the trait or traits they are to focus on. Give them a few minutes to review it.
3. Hand out the sample labeled "Student A" and tell them that Partner A has just completed this piece of work. They are to take a few minutes independently to read through it, compare it to the rubric, and find words and phrases that they think describe what they see. Give them enough time to read the sample and review the rubric. Partner A writes her thoughts on the Assessment Dialogue form (Figure 3.13 or 3.14). Partner B writes his thoughts on scratch paper. (Alternatively, you can have them mark phrases on the scoring rubric, but you will have to have separate copies for each activity.)
4. When all are ready, ask them to conduct a three-minute conference with their partners. Partner A speaks first. When it's Partner B's turn to speak, Partner A writes B's comments on the Assessment Dialogue form.
5. While they are talking with each other, walk around the room and look for students who are using the language of quality and students who seem to be struggling. Make note of where problems seem to be if they don't quite have the hang of it yet. Address the problems in general terms after the first simulation, before beginning the second one. ("Some of you seemed to struggle a bit with _____. What did you notice?"; "How might we solve that problem? What are some things you can do?")
6. Time their conferences—give them a two-minute reminder and then let them know when three minutes are up. Ask them to thank their partners.

7. Then you can have partners discuss what "Student A" could do next, either by working together to fill out the "My Plan" portion of the Assessment Dialogue form or as a large-group exploration of strategies that might improve the work.
8. You may want to conduct a brief discussion at this point if you noticed some problems at step 5.
9. Repeat the process with the second sample, labeled "Student B," where Partner B is the student and Partner A is the teacher.
10. Debrief the process by taking five minutes to ask students questions such as these:
    - What was easy about this? What was hard?
    - What did you discover when you were being the student? What did you learn when you were being the teacher?
    - What did this teach you about _____ (the elements of quality they were focused on)?
    - How would you describe the characteristics of helpful feedback?

In certain contexts, such as mathematics problem solving, before engaging in a three-minute conference simulation, students should attempt to solve the problem themselves. Then they put their own work aside and participate in the simulation with anonymous samples. At the conclusion, they can review their own solutions and make any changes they think of after having discussed the two samples.

What does engaging in the simulation do for students? It acclimates them to the idea that they might think first about their work before asking someone else to look it over. It prepares them to give feedback to others, and it causes them to think more deeply about the elements of quality they are learning.

Students can use the same process to seek and offer feedback from one another. The peer conference version of the Assessment Dialogue form found in Appendix B includes a line in which they can request further feedback either from a specific person or choose between "teacher" and "peer" (where you assign the partners), depending on your preference.

Evidence suggests that in peer feedback situations, struggling learners benefit from heterogeneous pairing or grouping, while stronger students do well in either homogenous or heterogeneous groups (White & Frederiksen, 1998). So,

consider assigning heterogeneous partners or groups of three or four members, at least until the struggling students are performing more successfully.

About Peer Editing . . .

If you have students edit each other's work for issues of correctness, consider requiring that they first have reviewed their own papers and have found all the errors they are capable of finding. The argument for peer editing (and it is valid, in my opinion) is that in life beyond school, we ask others to check over our work when correctness counts. Let us model in-school peer editing after beyond-school practice: we don't ask others to do our work for us—we check it first. To let students hand over the complete editing task to someone else encourages a bad habit—expecting someone else to do their work. If you have taught students editors' symbols, they can use them to mark errors on one another's papers, but hold the original author responsible for making the changes.

Making Sure Students Understand the Language of Quality

If students are not comfortable with the concepts included in your scoring rubric (or other definition of quality you will ultimately use to judge their work), they won't be able to give each other useful feedback reliably, so make sure they have engaged in some version of Strategies 1 and 2 prior to engaging in this Strategy 3 activity.

Sometimes, having students peer edit is not recommended. Although every paper does not have to be edited entirely by the author, in English class you need to evaluate each student's usage of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization periodically within the context of their writing. Peer editing masks individual achievement because it is a joint effort. If you teach English, keep in mind that there are times in life beyond school when we have to produce the best version of error-free text we are capable of, independent of others, and help students develop this capability by teaching them to edit solo.

When writing conventions are not the focus of the achievement to be demonstrated, encourage students to use peer editors.

Peer Response Groups

You may want to broaden the experience by expanding from partner feedback to small-group feedback. Think of peer feedback in group settings as "assessment conversations" that students have with one another. Set the stage for these conversations by establishing norms or guidelines for how they will take

place: what protocol students are to follow, kinds of comments likely to be most helpful, how to offer feedback, and how to respond when receiving it.

Here is an example of a procedure based on how a writing response group functions, which can be adapted to peer feedback groups responding to written work in any content area. Groups of three or four members generally work best; they provide some diversity of opinion and can complete the process in 20 to 30 minutes.

1. All members come prepared to read their work in progress. This means they are prepared to give it a good interpretive reading to showcase the ideas as clearly as possible.
2. Before reading, each person identifies what aspects of quality he or she would like feedback on. Ideally, they relate to concepts in the scoring rubric or other mutually understood characteristics. What specifically should members listen for?
3. When one person is reading, every one else listens.
4. The author reads through once. Other group members listen without commenting. At the end of the reading, group members take a few minutes to jot down thoughts. (This is an optional step, but helpful for the group to think more clearly about the piece as a whole).
5. The author reads through a second time. Group members take notes, focusing on the feedback requested.
6. Group members either share their thoughts orally or write them down. If written, they can share them right after the author has read or save them until all have finished reading and then read comments at the end. Figure 3.15 shows a sample peer response recording form. (See Appendix B for a reproducible version of Figure 3.15.)

Suggestions for Students in Peer Response Groups

Here are some suggestions for what you might tell students when they are receiving peer feedback (derived in part from Spandel, 2009):

1. Think about what you want the group to pay attention to—what do you want feedback on? Let your group know. For example, if you have questions about how to handle an idea or where to take it, ask for suggestions.

Figure 3.15

Peer Response Feedback Sheet

Date: _____

Author: _____

Title: _____

Feedback Requested: _____

My response: _____

_____

2. Give your paper the best reading you can so that your group can really visualize what you are saying.
3. Don't apologize. You want the group to offer honest responses about your work. "Just plunge in. . . . Be brave. Read your text with confidence so that the feedback you get will be more about your writing and less about you" (Spandel, 2009, p. 360).
4. Thank group members for their comments. Don't argue with them. It's okay if you don't agree with them, but you don't have to tell them that. Think of their comments as gifts—some gifts you use and some you put away, but you always thank the giver. You are in charge of your work, so you get to decide which comments to act on. Even if you don't think you will use the comment, say thank you.

Here are some suggestions for what you might tell students when they are giving feedback:

1. Use your best listening skills: first, listen to what the author wants feedback on and then keep that in mind as you listen to him read.
2. You are offering the author the gift of an audience response to her ideas. Positive feedback isn't always praise. Sometimes it's an honest response that shares what her ideas caused you to see, to understand, to feel, or to think differently about.

3. If you have a question or a suggestion to offer, phrase it as an "I" statement: "I felt confused when . . ."; "I wondered why . . ."; "I wanted to know more about. . . ." If your first thought begins with "You need to . . .", you have come up with a solution to a problem. Think about the *question in your mind* that triggered your solution idea and offer the *question* as feedback. Comments that help the author figure out what needs work can be even more valuable than comments that tell the author what to do (unless that is what he has asked for).
4. Remember that the author is in charge of the quality of the paper. Your feedback doesn't have to fix everything. Your role is to offer your thoughts respectfully.

Figure 3.16 describes how a high school English department conducts peer feedback sessions, and Figure 3.17 gives subject-specific suggestions for using peer feedback.

Figure 3.16

FOR EXAMPLE

Peer Review in High School English Classes

In grades 9–12 (in our school), individual teachers tend to have their own way to handle peer review, but there are some universal trends. Typically, peer review is used to create student learning conversations during the middle phase of the writing process. For some teachers, once students have working drafts, they meet in partnerships or small teams to review their work. The review process is focused on ideas and content, organization and structure, and voice. Many teachers adapt the 6+1 trait rubric so that it can be used by the kids to formatively assess the work of their peers.

After providing time in class to review, students use the comments to revise their drafts. At this time, many teachers formally collect the revised drafts (or specific paragraphs) to offer their comments. When the paper is returned, students use the teacher's comments (and writing conferences) to start working on their final drafts. Several days before the due date, students get back in their peer review partnerships/groups and look at their essays again. This time grammar and conventions are evaluated along with the other traits. Throughout the process, students complete metacognitive reflection tasks that ask them to think about the strengths and weaknesses of their drafts. Our Creative Writing class uses a workshop approach that involves one full week per unit devoted to peer review.

Source: Used with permission from Michael L. Doman, Naperville Community Unit School District 203, Naperville, IL, 2009.

Figure 3.17

FOR EXAMPLE

Subject-specific Peer Feedback Applications

Mathematics: Students can critique each other's extended problem solutions. Let them read through each other's solutions and explanations and then offer comments on whichever aspects of quality you (or they) select as the focus. They can use a student-friendly scoring rubric to guide their critiques. For example, if the focus is Mathematical Communication, they can give feedback on clarity and completeness of the explanation and correct usage of mathematical terms.

Science: Students may be working on a project that demonstrates their mastery of the inquiry process. Depending on the requirements of the task, they may either read their work aloud or exchange work with another student for feedback on one or more characteristics of quality. They also will need a student-friendly scoring rubric or explicit list of criteria to guide their critiques (e.g., formulating an hypothesis; designing and conducting an investigation; gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data; communicating results [National Research Council, 1996]).

Social studies: Students may be working on a paper that compares and contrasts two religions they are studying. It will be very important here as well that they have a student-friendly scoring rubric or explicit list of criteria that offers a clear notion of what constitutes quality as it relates to social studies knowledge and reasoning learning targets (e.g., presents accurate factual information, chooses appropriate things to compare, chooses appropriate characteristics on which to base comparisons, identifies similarities and differences accurately, explains similarities and differences with sufficient detail [Marzano, Pickering, & McTighe, 1993]).

Writing: Younger students can begin by looking or listening for one thing: a phrase that sparks their imagination, a surprising word, a catchy beginning, a stretchy sentence. Model this for them by first pointing out characteristics of good writing in what you read aloud to them: "I noticed. . . ." Invite them to offer their own observations: "What did you notice?" Then move to identifying those characteristics in examples of student writing (not from them). Ask them for suggestions of what they might notice in their classmates' writing and what they might like to have others notice in theirs. Let them practice on anonymous student work, before trying it with a partner. Debrief by asking them what feelings and thoughts the experience elicited.

Tips for Timing

It's helpful to think carefully in advance about how much time you will allow for students to participate in peer response groups. To make the process as efficient as possible, consider these suggestions:

- Students don't need to share the whole piece of work if they only need or want feedback on a portion of it.
- Keep feedback groups fairly small—three to four students per group. This process takes time and the more students in a group, the longer it will take.
- Give students a timeframe for each portion of the process. How long should each member spend presenting his work? How long for group members to compose their responses? How long for sharing their responses?

Conclusion

Teaching students to see their work as opportunities to improve is at the heart of learning. When we offer feedback effectively, students greet assessment information warmly, because it builds a hopeful vision: "I think I can do this"—rather than establishing a dreaded, fatalistic sense: "Here I go again, down the drain grade-wise for another year." We can model an open, forward-looking stance to learning through how we respond to their work and then we can show them how to look at their own work in the same way.