Peer-Review Guidelines for Capstone Courses

"Be bold and constructive with your feedback, but don't give any feedback you would not want to receive." –Carolyn Trietsch

What Is a Peer Review, and How Will It Work?
As a capstone student in the English department, you will engage in peer review three times during the semester. Peer review, just to be clear, is an evaluation of work by others specializing in the same field. Your peers are other capstone students, and they will be reading and commenting on drafts of your writing, as you will do for them. Because Capstone-Eligible courses are limited to no more than five capstone students, your peer groups will be relatively small. To prepare for these reviews, you will trade papers via email and read your peers' work carefully. During the reviews, you will discuss your thoughts and suggestions and ask your peers any questions that they might help you answer about your own project.

Peer reviews will occur during the week 4, week 7, and week 11 of the semester. In addition to offering verbal critique and feedback, each Capstone student is required to produce a written review for each of their peers. Each peer review should be 350-500 words, written in 12pt. font with 1" margins and page numbers. These reviews should be given to the student on the day of the review and also submitted electronically to your professor.

- The first review will focus on helping your fellow writers develop and refine ideas for their capstone project. Focus your verbal and written critique on brainstorming and refining ideas. Think seriously about whether the ideas have merit and whether they can be explored adequately within the requisite number of pages.
- The second review will focus on structure and organization. Focus your verbal and written critique on these issues, pointing out any flaws in how the story is developed.
- The third review will focus on revising the project at the sentence level. Pay attention to style, voice, grammar and punctuation. During this third review, you will also help your peers prepare for their 12th week meeting with the faculty member supervising the capstone projects (mainly by helping them develop good, strong questions to ask the faculty member about the project).

Please note: You will need to coordinate with your fellow capstone students to arrange meeting times, dates, and locations for these reviews, as class time will **not** be allocated for them.

How Do I Write a Peer Review?
For each review, and before you read a single word of a draft, begin by asking questions of the writer, such as "What is your purpose in writing this project?" and "Who's your audience?" Also make sure to ask what the writer most wants/needs from a reader at this stage. Then, read through (or listen to) the draft without commenting.

Once you're ready to write your comments, begin by praising what you think works well in the draft. Be specific in your praise; single out particular moments or elements in the project that you like especially, explaining *why* you like them. Then, tackle the big issues first, such as whether the draft follows the spirit and general guidelines of "The Story of My Major;" whether the ideas

are important and exciting; whether the main point is clear and compelling; whether the draft is effectively organized; and whether anything needs development. Then go on to smaller issues, such as grammar, word choice, confusing sentences, etc.

Time is limited, so concentrate on the most important ways the draft could be improved. To help you, here are some additional guidelines:

- Be specific in your response (explain where you get stuck, what you don't understand) and in your suggestions for revision. And as much as you can, explain why you're making particular suggestions.
- Try describing what you see at work in the paper–what you identify as the main point, what you see as the organizational pattern. Who knows? You may be seeing or understanding the paper in a way that's very different—and perhaps better!—than what the author intended.
- Identify what's missing, what needs to be explained more fully. Also identify what can be cut.

How Do I Format and Submit My Peer Review?

Each peer review should be between 350-500 words, written in 12pt. font with 1" margins and page numbers. On the day of the peer review session, you will bring your review, using it to talk through your suggestions and ideas. You will submit your written review to your peers as well as to the faculty member teaching the course, who will use the reviews as part of their evaluation of your capstone performance.