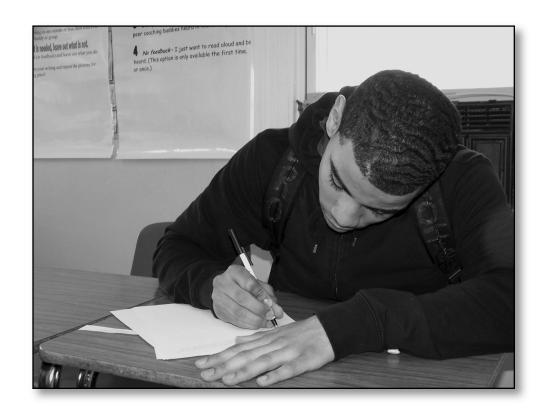# Student Roles and Steps of Peer Coaching

What They Look Like in the Classroom

Since I can't possibly attend to the needs of 24 students, it's crucial that I teach students how to support one another and themselves.

—Laura Robb, *Easy-to-Manage Reading & Writing Conferences*

Four student roles drive the coaching effort. Two are absolutes: *writer* and *responder.* Two other roles—*editor* and *manager*—operate more flexibly and are worked in when students fully understand the writer and responder roles.

ROLES AND STEPS IN A NUTSHELL

The matrix at the start of Part I, placed there for ease of reference throughout your perusal of this book, outlines the steps and protocols for the pivotal tasks of each of the student peer-coaching roles: writer, responder, editor, and manager. Students will come to know these role tasks well. Note that it is important for reinforcement to use consistent language when referencing all program steps and protocols. Hanging the posters found in Part III (Nos. 31–36) around the classroom so that they are always visible will help to reinforce the steps while serving as a regular reference point for students as they assimilate the process.

As you can see from the Master Matrix on page 2, within each step of student peer coaching there are specific communication protocols to follow, such as (1) how to begin a feedback statement, first with "I liked . . . ," then with "I heard . . . ," thus avoiding *you* statements unless in the form of a question or *I liked* phrase; (2) how to verbally position a goal in front of peers with "I need . . . "; and (3) how to listen effectively and intentionally using organizers, checklists, and notes. Ultimately, student writers apply an intentional think-through process to decide what feedback to use and what feedback not to use in their writing effort while drawing on the peer-coaching process to respond with the appropriate feedback.

Here are a few field-based principles on the whys of the student peer coaching steps—basics keyed to my work in the field with student writers and the pedagogy I continue to apply:

• Students (especially adolescents), however well meaning or *not* so well meaning, need direction in responding to peers both in and out of the classroom. Not always effective in how they respond, they can lapse easily and quickly into negative discursive environments or simply say the wrong thing at the wrong time. Students need to be focused on the reader and his or her stated needs and goals in order to be supportive enough to offer effective feedback—this is teamwork.

• Students respond to themselves and to each other better when they set goals for their writing; their goals should be specific to each writing piece and to the writers themselves, as well as to the teacher's parameters for the project. Goal setting helps students identify and pay attention to areas that need focus in order to fully develop their writing and problem solve where needed.

• Adolescent students respond to each other more effectively when taught the appropriate language to use. When they *all* use that language, the playing field is leveled, a safety net is provided, and their need for structure is met. Middle and secondary school students need to know that there are rules in place that keep language appropriate, positive, and flowing.

THE CLASSROOM MODELS
WHOLE CLASS, GROUPS, BUDDIES

When teaching peer coaching for the first time, it makes best *logistical* sense to teach it as a whole class activity—students can see it modeled, ask questions that elicit answers that all can benefit from, brainstorm together, and parcel through all of the elements as a group. It's easier to teach new material this way, but, as teachers, we know the realities. Not all students, especially if not accustomed to reading their work in front of others, will want to get up in front of an entire class, or even a small group, and read aloud (some middle school students would be devastated!). Because of this, it would be best to introduce them first to buddy sessions, at least for the read-aloud part—in short, begin with the whole class for introduction and/or review of the steps and protocols, then re-form students into buddy sessions. In the whole-class sessions, all students are responders, so writers have the benefit of many different feedback types, as do the responders in practicing feedback. In buddy sessions, students are more limited, albeit more private and intimate. Buddy pairs can always be brought back together for debriefing after writers and responders have worked through all the steps and protocols.

   Much of the initial decision making will depend on how much time is available for language arts or English instruction, the size of the classroom, the comfort level of students when reading their work to peers, and, of course, your students' knowledge of and extent of practice with goal setting, identifying trouble spots in their writing, and communicating what type of feedback they want from their peers. The extent of prior practice will drive how much and what you must teach them before actually implementing the peer-coaching process (Chapters 5, 6, and 7 contain lesson plans to prepare students for each step). Following is a description and rationale for the exercising of each class model within the peer coaching process.

Whole Class

   Using a whole-class model is recommended for initially rolling out the process by modeling and teaching the class the writer and responder steps and protocols. Begin with the model lessons for teaching Step One found at the end of Chapter 5, where students are introduced to the concepts of setting goals, identifying issues, making feedback choices, and preparing to listen. Lessons for Step Two, found at the end of Chapter 6, cover summarizing and active listening. These lessons are to be followed by the teaching of Step Three, which uses modeling strategies to teach the integration of feedback into the writing drafts. Lessons for teaching Step Three are found at the end of Chapter 7. When all steps have been introduced, students can be released to buddy sessions for practice in giving and receiving feedback, one as writer, the other as responder, interchangeably. After practicing with buddies, bring them back to whole class for debriefing. Continue in the next session with more focus lessons, releasing students again for practice in buddy or group sessions to read their drafts aloud for giving and receiving feedback. Once they have assimilated the process, students will simply move into groups or buddy sessions as needed (like magic!).

Groups (4–5 Students)

As in the whole-class model, teaching the initial process in groups is recommended after all students have been given minilessons on the various skills required for success: goal setting, establishing trouble spots, active listening, making feedback choices, and using and implementing the various forms found in Part III. In groups, all students are responders, while writers, after communicating their goals, issues, and feedback choices, individually share their writing drafts. When writers finish reading, they will call on one responder at a time to give feedback while taking notes or gathering notes taken by responders while listening. Forms for note taking are in Part III, and they are discussed in the Roles section that follows.

Buddies

As with group instruction, students must first be taught a succession of lessons to facilitate their peer-coaching efforts; these lessons familiarize them with required skills, such as goal setting and issue identifying. Buddies provide a more personal forum for students to exchange feedback and a safe haven of sorts for those reluctant to share their work with peers. I recommend that buddies be alternated so that students receive a variety of peer feedback from which to choose.

In all settings, daily or regular minilessons can address student weaknesses, which teachers are able to identify when circulating among students during peer-coaching sessions. Figure 1.1 outlines how each of the roles would operate within each class setting.

SCHEDULING FOR INSTRUCTION

At first glance, fitting the peer-coaching program into a regular school day can be tricky. However, I've discovered that with careful scheduling, difficulties can be easily surmounted. Figure 1.2 outlines a typical 60- to 90-minute literacy block implementing the process once students are trained in the steps, roles, and protocols. Both middle school block scheduling and high school English period scheduling can easily accommodate themselves to the program. The next chart, Figure 1.3, outlines peer-coaching implementation in a typical 30-minute language arts class period.

STUDENT ROLES AND
THE FORMS TO HELP THEM

The remainder of this chapter includes a complete description of the student roles and the tasks within each role, as well as a delineation of all the relevant forms found in Part III as they apply to the functioning of each of the roles. These forms are tools for students to use when setting goals, when deciding what they need help with (issues), and when making feedback choices. Teacher forms, in

Figure 1.1 Managing Student Roles in Different Class Settings

Whole Class	Groups	Buddies
Writer and Responder	*Writer and Responder*	*Writer and Responder*
Teach the requisite skills at each step: goal setting, identifying issues, making feedback choices, summarizing, articulating feedback to the writer. Move students into buddy sessions for Steps Two and Three, or have one student at a time read her or his piece aloud to the class. When writers read to the entire class, each student becomes a responder.	Requisite skills are taught through minilessons before grouping (4 to 5 students per group). The writer communicates goals and issues to all responders. Responders provide feedback to the writer orally, with the writer calling on one at a time for feedback and writing down feedback notes as needed.	After practicing with the requisite skills in the whole-class setting, writers and responders are paired up for Steps Two and Three to give and receive feedback interchangeably. Ideally, students will switch buddies throughout the drafting stages, or the teacher can assign different buddies.
Whole Class	*Groups*	*Buddies*
Manager, Editor	*Manager, Editor*	*Manager, Editor*
Assign one manager and one editor for every three groups of students, or three managers and three editors for 30 students. Managers circulate when students are peer coaching to coach and monitor proper effort. Editors begin circulating *after* all students have received feedback, including the editor if necessary (often, editors are students who finish early). Once feedback has finished, editors will begin looking for clues or signals from students that need editorial assistance.	Assign one manager and one editor for each group of students (groups of 4 to 6). Managers will begin their work immediately; editors will circulate after all students have gone through the feedback process, working with students one-on-one using one of three editor's forms. Students will let the editor know when they are ready for editorial assistance or use an established system of clues, such as placing a pencil off to the side to indicate they are ready for assistance.	Assign three managers and three editors for every 15 students—or six for a class of 30 (when possible). The same procedures are used for managers and editors as in the whole-class and group sessions, with managers circulating and students signaling when they need or are ready for editorial assistance.

Figure 1.2 Peer-Coaching Literacy Block Model (60 to 90 Min.)

Minutes	Activity
15–20	Silent writing time (students continue working on drafts, begin new drafts, or prepare material for peer coaching).
10–20	Review and practice (when necessary) of a step or protocol within a step: goal setting, identifying issues in their writing, or active listening.
30–40	Peer coaching with buddies or in groups: asking for feedback, giving feedback, and receiving feedback.
10–20	Students return to their writing to make changes, import feedback, or work with editors.

Figure 1.3   Peer-Coaching Language Arts Class Model (30 Min.)

Day	Activity	Minutes
Day 1	• Silent writing (or writing silently) • Lesson or lesson review of skills (goal setting, issue identifying, active listening, etc.)	5–10 20–25
Day 2	• Peer coaching • Review/debriefing	20–25 5–10
Day 3	• Silent writing (or writing silently) • Lesson or lesson review of skills (goal setting, issue identifying, active listening, etc.)	5–10 20–25
Day 4	• Peer coaching • Review/debriefing	20–25 5–10
Day 5	• Silent writing (or writing silently) • Lesson or lesson review of skills (goal setting, issue identifying, active listening, etc.)	5–10 20–25

Note: Eventually, when students understand and have mastered the feedback process, sessions in both models move to writing and peer coaching recursively. Students peer coach as needed, with the teacher circulating among them, taking anecdotal notes, offering suggestions on feedback choices, and ensuring that students are using the protocols properly. Proper use of the protocols involves helping students formulate specific suggestions and coaching their feedback responses: "*When might we want to select the* I heard *choice?*" "*What situation would call for* No Feedback*?*" and so forth.

addition to the student forms, are also included in Part III (and are outlined in successive chapters as they become relevant). These reproducible student tools are listed and described below.

The Writer Role: Responsibilities and Related Forms

In addition to producing the initial draft, which is the subject of the peer-coaching process, writers must also read their drafts out loud to a peer buddy or to peers in a small group, unless extenuating circumstances dictate otherwise (speech impairment, loss of voice, modifications, teacher discretion). All students will function in this role at some point.

• As the content for the session, writers must bring a writing piece or draft prepared prior to the session. They may also create one at the outset of the peer-coaching session during silent writing time. Since goal setting takes place in the very early stages of development, the draft will guide the development of a goal. Students may, and often do, change their goals throughout the course of working over a draft.

• Step One: *Establish goals and issues, and make a feedback choice.* These are the forms that will help writers with Step One:
  ○ **Goals List (No. 1)**. This checklist will help students determine a goal using a think-through process. Writers will distinguish their goal distinct from the project's goal or the teacher-assigned goal.

- **Identifying an Issue Checklist (No. 3).** Using a think-through, this checklist will help students determine, from among possibilities, what they might want or need help with.
- **Feedback Type Checklist (No. 5).** This checklist offers five choices for feedback: (1) feedback on goals, (2) feedback on issues, (3) feedback on goals and issues, (4) "I heard . . ." feedback, or (5) no feedback. (See Chapter 5 for more detail.) If no feedback at all is wanted, and writers simply want to read, they may request the No Feedback option, but only once per draft. Students will still receive "I liked . . ." feedback with this option.

- Step Two: *Summarize and read.* Once the goals and any needs are communicated, the writer must summarize the writing piece briefly and then read it aloud to peers so that responders can come back with the feedback asked for. These are the forms that will help writers with Step Two:
  - **Writer Summary Organizer (No. 14).** This form will help students pare their writing down to its most essential and important elements, so they can summarize the piece in a minute or less, according to the Step Two protocol.
  - **Oral Reading Rubric (No. 15).** This rubric sets oral reading expectations for effective communication of student-writing drafts through verbal and nonverbal presentation techniques that include intonation, pitch, intended message, poise, eye contact, and persuasion.

- When writers finish reading in a whole-class or group setting, they must call on one person at a time to give them feedback. If they are in a one-on-one buddy session, the writer and responder will take turns—one reading, the other giving feedback, and then they will change roles.

- Step Three: *Decide what feedback to use.* Writers will take notes during and after the feedback session, reflecting on the important editorial decisions they are making. These are the forms that will help them with Step Three:
  - **Writer Reflection Organizer (No. 12).** Writers fill out this form after the feedback session to reflect on feedback offered before deciding what to keep and what to leave out.
  - **Self-Feedback Checklist (No. 8)**. This form is used when students need to self-coach or work through the peer-coaching feedback process independently (the form is a tool for self-coaching), as well as when incorporating Step Three for making decisions. Writers are walked through a think-through process on feedback to reconcile their goals, issues, and feedback selection. Writers may also use this form to take notes on while receiving feedback from responders.

The Responder Role: Responsibilities and Related Forms

Responders must listen specifically for what writers establish as issues, as goals, and as a feedback type wanted. This is an important role, and all writing

and drafting efforts hinge upon how effectively responders are able use active listening skills to develop productive feedback responses. Because responders have the serious responsibility of tailoring their feedback to exactly what was listened for, they need to listen intentionally, actively, and with purpose. In turn, they must respond with and articulate clearly not only what they heard but also what they liked and what writers asked for. Lessons that teach the listening protocols can be found in Part II, Chapters 6 and 7.

• Step One: *Listen for the goals and issues.* Responders will take notes as needed while writers read their drafts, and they listen with intention to what the writers' goals and issues are for the writing piece. With much to listen for, responders are always encouraged to ask questions of the writers before giving feedback. These are the forms that will help responders carry through on Step One:

  o **Active Listening Checklist (No. 6).** This checklist helps responders position themselves for listening actively and with purpose by focusing on body positioning, body language, mental referencing, referencing goals and issues, and other tips for listening purposefully and actively.

  o **Good Listening Rubric (No. 16).** This rubric makes student responders aware of the expectations for active listening while providing them with a tool for monitoring progress and rising to the expectations.

  o **Peer Feedback Checklist (No. 7).** To position their listening, responders note writers' goals, issues, and feedback selection. This checklist also prompts them to ask questions and provides a think-through list of prompts for later feedback consideration. While this form is useful in implementing Steps One and Two for listening, it is also useful as a reflective piece in Step Three.

• Step Two: *Listen to the piece as it is read (listening with a purpose).* Responders will take notes before writers read aloud and also during the reading, recording thoughts for later feedback. These are the forms that will help responders with Step Two:

  o **Peer Feedback Checklist (No. 7).** Responders record writer feedback while listing information in Sections 1, 2, and 3 for note taking and reflection.

  o **Responder Reflection Organizer (No. 13).** After listening, responders fill out this reflection sheet to reflect on thoughts and notes taken to position what they are going to give as feedback to writers.

• Step Three: *Give feedback to the writer.* Responders first say something positive using an "I liked . . ." statement before offering any other feedback suggestions, then they follow with "I heard . . ." statements, and continue with helpful, focused feedback without using the word *you.*

• In place of "you" statements, students will use "I" statements for offering suggestions, such as *"I might try . . . ," "I have tried . . . ," "I would . . . ," "I*

heard . . . ." The word *you* can only be used within an "I liked" statement such as, *"I liked how you . . . ,"* or inside of a question such as *"Have you tried . . . ?"* The following forms, also used in Step Two, will help Responders in Step Three:

> o **Peer Feedback Checklist (No. 7).** Section 4 offers suggested prompts for beginning feedback statements, such as *"I liked the way . . . ,"* *"I might try . . . ,"* and *"Has this been tried . . . ?"*
>
> o **Responder Reflection Organizer (No. 13).** Responders refer to this form to reflect (again) on what they heard, what the goals and issues were, writers' feedback selection, and any thoughts that came to them while listening to position themselves for giving the writer feedback.

TEACHING TIPS FOR THE WRITER AND RESPONDER ROLES

- If students are apprehensive about reading their work in front of others, allow them to buddy up with a partner of their choice until they warm up to the process, especially if peer coaching in a whole-class or group setting. Allow them to reconvene with larger groups after they have read and received feedback.
- Certain instances may call for the writer role to be shared by two peers—one writing, setting the goal, the issue, and the feedback type, while the other reads the piece out loud. In such instances, appoint a reader, or have the student select one—someone he or she trusts or has an established working/peer relationship with. This technique might also be used as part of the protocol *initially* to ease writers into reading aloud.
- Practice listening protocols, such as those behaviors named on the **Active Listening Checklist (No. 6)** and the **Good Listening Rubric (No. 16)**. Practice across all content areas and in multiple situations—casual, formal, at home, or in any peer discussions related to class work. Encourage students to use journal reflection on their experiences.

Editor Role: Responsibilities and Related Forms

Though all writers should and will ultimately serve as editors for their own writing draft, a peer editor will help writers on several levels during the drafting process and throughout successive sessions. The editor's role is introduced only after students understand, are comfortable with, and have had plenty of practice with all three steps in the writer and responder roles. Editors circulate among students as assigned by the teacher, although a few may volunteer. (See Figure 1.2 for editor classroom grouping.) Editors begin their work *after* students have completed peer coaching in Steps Two and Three, the giving and receiving of feedback, and have resumed working on their drafts.

Editors can be helpful with struggling readers and writers or students identified as needing academic assistance in whole-class, group, or buddy sessions. Good student editors can offer more personal guidance focusing on areas relevant to the protocol—goal setting, issue identifying, feedback type, summarizing, feedback decision making, grammar, punctuation, and other

English usage. The following forms, found in Part III, will help editors carry out their responsibilities:

- **Editor's Before Coaching Checklist (No. 9).** Editors record writers' feedback choice, goals, and issues as identified while helping them through a think-through process designed to solidify and clarify the feedback.

- **Editor's After and Between Coaching Checklist (No. 10).** Editors offer assistance in successive rounds of student peer coaching, particularly as it applies to incorporating feedback. Editors work writers through another thinking process (1) to reconcile feedback with goals, issues, and the feedback choice, and (2) to help decide what feedback is most useful so that it can be incorporated into the writing piece.

- **Editor's Final Checklist and Rubric (No. 11).** Editors help writers with the final stages of their draft, particularly in incorporating feedback into the writing—solidifying goals, reconciling feedback with what was asked for and what will be most useful, and using feedback that helps with issues identified. The rubric portion of this checklist will help writers and editors check for grammar, proper syntax, and usage by focusing on ideas and content, word choice, and conventions.

The Manager Role: Responsibilities and Related Forms

The manager role is introduced once students have an understanding of the writer and responder roles, as well as the total process. It is by far the most popular role, particularly among my middle school students. Those who may struggle with conceptualizing the process, and especially struggling writers who are reluctant to write and share their work, often want to "play" the role as manager. Students who become managers have the opportunity to observe, orchestrate, and conceptualize while fulfilling a need to be successful. In high school, the manager position is a natural fit for those who finish their writing early, need a break from their writing, or demonstrate leadership tendencies. The role also tends to build students' confidence in the process as a whole, adding a comfort level to reading aloud in front of peers, setting goals, asking for help, and articulating feedback. The manager role also provides students with a sense of responsibility and ownership. Like the editors, managers will float among groups, buddy sessions, and whole-class sessions. Managers should

- Organize and keep track of the student peer-coaching session, including helping the teacher organize the classroom, hand out proper forms, and orient others to their groups or buddy sessions;

- Remind students about the steps and protocols within the steps, for example, using "I liked . . ." statements and avoiding the word *you;*

- Alert the editor to someone who may be ready for his or her assistance;

- Use the **Manager's Checklist (No. 17)** to check off the proper execution of role steps, protocols, and responsibilities for writers, responders, and editors.

TEACHING TIPS FOR THE EDITOR AND MANAGER ROLES

- Usually, students who finish their final draft early like to volunteer to be editor. Ideally, these are the students to assign to the role if the teacher is assigning them. They tend to be the more proficient writers, capable of, and good at, offering other writers individual editorial assistance.
- If editors, either assigned or volunteered, need to continue working on their drafts through a round of peer coaching, allow them to—their work does not begin until students have finished giving and receiving feedback. If they have no draft to work on, allow them to sit in as a responder before they begin to execute their responsibilities.
- Editors, when paired properly with writers, can be a wonderful resource to struggling writers. Consider floating editors that focus in on struggling writers.
- Develop a system that students can use to indicate they need the assistance of an editor when in buddy or group sessions, such as placing a card upside down on their desk or placing their pencil in a designated spot. Editors can pay attention to these cues for assistance and respond without having attention called to students' needs.
- Managers can be particularly helpful in strengthening those students who are apprehensive about the process or who are struggling to conceptualize it. Consider allowing students who are struggling to be managers, even though they may be behind in their work. Placing trust in them can go a long way in their transitioning as well as boosting their confidence in all parts of the process.

Student peer-coaching roles contribute immensely to the building of enthusiasm in the writing process. In addition to the steps and the protocols within the steps, taking on a role facilitates for both middle and high school students a strong sense of community, responsibility, and ownership in their writing and the writing of their peers. Peer coaching is team effort made stronger by the roles that students assume to work collaboratively toward a single goal: that of writing improvement for each and every class member.